

50 Cents.

50 Cents.

A DISPUTED INHERITANCE

BY AUTHOR OF
"THE ORIGINAL MR. JACOBS."

"AMERICAN SERIES," No. 2,
ED MONTHLY, (EXTRA), MAY, 1888.

NEW YORK,
M. J. IVERS & CO., PUBLISHERS.

Entered at Post Office, New York, as Second-class matter.



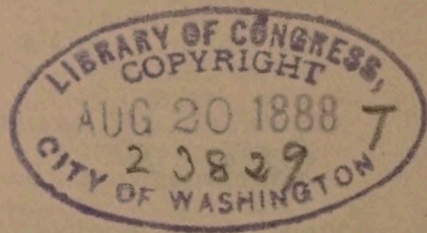
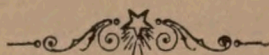
AMERICAN SERIES.

A DISPUTED INHERITANCE.

*A THRILLING STORY OF LOVE,
MYSTERY, AND INTRIGUE.*

BY THE AUTHOR OF "THE ORIGINAL MR. JACOBS."

40
I.T.T. magazine



NEW YORK:

M. J. IVERS & CO., PUBLISHERS,

86 NASSAU STREET.

COPYRIGHT 1888, BY M. J. IVERS & CO.

PZ³
T481D1

ARGYLE PRESS,
PRINTING AND BOOKBINDING,
24 & 26 WOOSTER ST., N. Y.

Ms. A. 9. 2. 11. Nov. 30, 1907.

A DISPUTED INHERITANCE.

CHAPTER I.

LA GERALDINE was not a castle, for it had neither battlements nor turrets; it could not be called a cottage nor yet a farm-house, but was simply a large country house built by a rich druggist who loved comfort and despised architecture.

At the end of the park ran a river and this stream, though not a navigable one, was quite deep enough to drown in, as the druggist found to his cost. A Turkish proverb says: "When the house is finished, death enters," and the builder of La Geraldine, while strolling about his domain after a good dinner, fell into the river, and next day was fished out of it, dead. His heirs, not caring for country life, tried to sell the estate, but did not find a purchaser until thirty years had

elapsed. After the war of 1870 Madame Dandria bought it at half its value from the druggist's last descendant and made it her summer home.

She was a widow with an income which was thought large in the country, but was not much in Paris, as she had two young daughters, and a son who had just finished his term as volunteer and began the study of law.

These young people had, indeed, an old bachelor uncle—their father's brother—who was rich, but he had peculiar notions on the subject of inheritance, maintaining that a man had a right to leave his money as he chose, and even spend it all himself if it suited him to do so. But he was an affectionate uncle and brother-in-law, and being fond of society contrived to wake up the sleepy little town of Arcy, which was about seven miles from La Geraldine. He was in the habit of paying his brother's family a visit during the game season.

One evening in November Uncle Armand and Madame Dandria sat in the cheerful parlor together, the young ladies having gone upstairs to dress and their brother to town, ostensibly for the purpose of reading law. It was a stormy night; though there was no rain or snow as yet, the wind

was howling wildly, the great trees in the park waving and rustling, and the leaves blowing about in the gale.

Winter reigned outside, but indoors it seemed to be summer still, for all was warm and bright and there were flowers everywhere.

“What a gale it is blowing,” said Uncle Armand, after a long silence; “I am afraid the young swells in town will hardly care to brave such weather, even for the sake of my fair nieces.”

“No, we shall have no visitors to-night,” replied Madame Dandria, “but my girls can amuse themselves very well without them—and so can you, I think.”

“Oh, some of them are entertaining enough,” said the uncle, “and I think Ernestine and Germaine enjoy their visits. Germaine does, I am certain—she is so fond of talking and laughing and dancing. It is time she married,” he added, suddenly.

“She must wait until her elder sister is settled,” said the mother, quietly.

“Ernestine has more domestic, quiet tastes than her sister and a lovely character, but Germaine pleases every one, and at first sight.”

“Germaine should have a rich husband,” sighed

Madame Dandria, and her brother-in-law inquired, smilingly—

“Do you think Ernestine would take a poor one?”

“Yes, if she loved him. She is not ambitious nor frivolous, but thoughtful.”

“I have heard of volcanoes covered with snow,” interrupted the uncle, and seeing a frown of displeasure on his hearer’s brow he hastened to exclaim—

“I beg pardon. I take back the ‘volcano,’ since you object to the word. And, indeed, Queen, I appreciate my elder niece’s good qualities so fully that I think there is no one in the place good enough for her. Arthur du Pourméval is good-looking and no fool, and the girls seem to like him, but he spends his whole income—

“He is his uncle’s only heir,” put in Madame Dandria, in a low tone.

“An uncle’s money is what no one need make sure of,” said the rich bachelor, dryly; “let us talk of something else. Who is expected this evening?”

“Every one and no one. Dr. Sully may drop in, and perhaps our neighbors from across the river. Their nephew, M. du Pourméval, has talked about their coming for a long time.”

"You mean the Vignemals? It is not likely that they will venture out to-night. It is blowing a cyclone. Hark! What was that?"

"What do you mean?" asked the lady.

"I heard a cry from the garden. It sounded like a call for help."

He hurried to the window, and his sister-in-law said, reproachfully: "Do you mean to say that some one is being murdered on my grounds?"

"An accident may have happened. Perhaps one of the servants has fallen into the river."

"My servants do not ramble about at night."

"I hear—nothing now."

"Because there is nothing to hear."

"Or, perhaps, because the person who called is dead."

"Oh, Armand, you are intolerable! You know how nervous I am——"

She was interrupted by a burst of silvery laughter, as the door opened suddenly and two young girls came in, hand in hand.

The sisters were not at all alike.

The younger was a rosy blonde, with bright, black eyes, which sparkled with fun and mischief. The other was a pale brunette, with large, fine eyes and an air of thoughtfulness, though some-

times a quick flash of emotion would be seen in her eyes which were of an unusual color, dark and soft, but neither blue nor brown. Uncle Armand called it purple. Just now there was an expression of indifference on Ernestine's face, in spite of her sister's gay chattering.

"You seem to be very merry to-night, little girl," said her uncle.

"I have to make fun for two," answered Germaine, "for sister won't even smile, though I have told her no end of funny stories. She has made up her mind to be melancholy, and I am sure she has no reason for it. She is the belle wherever she goes, and this very week M. Arthur du Pourméval, the leader of fashion in Arcy, has waltzed seven times with her, and only honored me with three little mazurkas."

"Four, Germaine, I counted them," said Ernestine, quietly, "and you know very well that he dances with me only because he comes late and finds you engaged for the whole evening."

"Oh, I forgive him, but I wish he would come to-night and bring some of his friends with him. I have been sitting over my fancy-work for two days and feel the need of a change of exercise."

"Let us have some music," said the uncle,

“there will be no visitors, for the wind is fierce enough to blow all the young swells to atoms.”

“So it is,” cried Germaine, running to the window, “and it is snowing, too. How lovely! I love snow; it makes the trees look as if they were dressed for a ball, and they seem to be bowing to each other in the Lanciers. And then, when it freezes we can skate, and that is the best of all. The young gentlemen, though, are afraid of the cold. Bah! If I had a lover I should expect him to serenade me from the garden with the mercury at thirty below zero.”

Uncle Armand laughed, but Madame Dandria said, reprovingly—

“Germaine, do not rattle on so. Look, your sister has begun embroidering; why do you not help her?”

“Oh, I would rather play on the piano. I will try some quadrilles and imagine that I am dancing.”

She seated herself at the instrument, and a few minutes after a servant announced, “Dr. Sully.”

The visitor was welcomed cordially. He was a man who had passed his sixtieth year, but was straight as a poplar and strong as an oak. In his youth he had been an army surgeon and was now practising in Arcy, where he was very popular,

being an intelligent, well-bred, and worthy man. At La Geraldine he was a great favorite and delighted in passing his evenings there, for, like Uncle Armand, the Doctor had never married.

"If I had known you were braving this storm, Doctor, I should have thought it was you who cried for help just now," said the other gentleman.

"For help? Is any one hurt?" cried the Doctor. "What has happened?"

"Oh, be calm; it is nothing. I am not certain about the cry; my sister heard nothing."

"I hardly think that any one was out to-night but myself. I left Arthur and the others consoling themselves with baccarat."

"The monsters!" cried Germaine, "to play baccarat when there are two poor girls out here who have not waltzed for forty-eight hours."

"They have expensive horses, and dare not risk them," said the Doctor. "Young Pourméval has just bought a fine span."

"Is this Pourméval a rich man?" asked the uncle, carelessly, of the Doctor.

"Rich? No. He has enough to live on, but if he lives at the rate he does now—"

"Has he not a rich relative?"

"Your neighbor, M. Vignemal, is his uncle,

but he has not much to leave. The fortune belongs to Madame Vignemal, who was a rich widow when he married her. It is true that each has made a will in favor of the other, but as the gentleman is delicate, and the lady a marvel of good health, it is not likely that Pourméval will inherit. She cannot bear the sight of him, and she is sure to outlive her husband. I am sorry for that," continued the Doctor, "for Arthur is a good fellow, and with even a small fortune would be a desirable match."

He glanced quickly at Ernestine, and saw that she had not lost a word of what had been said, but she dropped her eyes without speaking, and went on with her work.

Germaine was turning over the music-books and did not seem interested in the financial prospects of Arthur du Pourméval.

"They are very peculiar people, these Vignemals," said Madame Dandria, after a pause. "I called on them some time ago, but could not see them, and, though they live so near, they have never returned my call."

"They never go anywhere," said the Doctor, "and for a most extraordinary reason. Madame is as jealous as a tiger. She married Vignemal

for love, and, though that was a quarter of a century ago, she still sees him as she saw him then, and imagines that every other woman will think as she does. And so, though he is fifty-five and wears a wig, she considers it advisable to keep him in durance vile, and he submits. But I know from the husband, himself, that they are soon coming to call here, for he asked me what hour of the day was best."

"I wish they would come to-night," said Germaine. "I should so like to see them, and, oh, dear, what fun I could have!"

Her eyes sparkled mischievously, but at a look from her mother she turned round to the piano again, and began playing softly.

"You saucy child," said her uncle. "There must be enough ridiculous people in Arcy, without those two, to satisfy your love of fun."

"They are only types, uncle, I want individuals."

"The deuce you do!" said the uncle, and she rattled on—

"You must confess that I am right. All the young men of Arcy talk and dress in exactly the same way. And the country people are just as bad."

"Excepting, of course, M. Arthur du Pourméval?"

"He is more of a Parisian, and would be interesting if he were not such a dandy."

"You prefer a Fra Diavolo, then?"

"Indeed I do!"

"Then I can supply you with one," put in Dr. Sully. "There is just such a personage living on your land."

"Oh, tell me where!" she cried.

"He is sometimes in your woods, sometimes on your river. He lives on your game and your fish."

"Is he young?"

"Almost twenty, and very handsome."

"Good, we will paint his portrait! At least Ernestine will."

"No, thank you," said the elder sister. "I do not care for savages."

"Nor I," said the uncle, "but I should like to catch this poacher—; What is the matter, Baptiste?" he asked as a servant entered the room hurriedly.

"There has been an accident, sir, on the river."

"Oh, I thought so. A drunken man, I suppose."

"No, sir, but it seems that M. and Mme. Vignemal were crossing in the ferry-boat and the rope broke—"

"Good heavens!" cried the lady of La Geraldine. "They were coming here, and they are drowned."

"Let us go and save them," cried Germaine, jumping up.

"Roland says it is too late, Miss."

"Who is Roland?"

"Roland Ferrer, the young man I was speaking of," said Dr. Sully, "and if he could not save them no one can, for he swims like a fish and dives like an otter."

"Then they are both dead," said Madame Dandria, "it is terrible. Indeed, it is, and as they died together, our friend Pourméval will be a gainer, I fancy."

"Who cares for what *he* gains," said Germaine. "We ought to go straight down to the river. People have been saved after being an hour in the water."

"Very seldom," said the Doctor, with a smile, "but I must go and see if there is anything to be done."

"Roland has gone back to the river to see if he can get the bodies," said the servant.

"Come, Doctor," said M. Dandria, "and, Queen, do not distress yourself so."

"I cannot help thinking that we are partly the cause of this terrible catastrophe," said the lady, "as they were coming to see us."

"You will take me with you, uncle?" said Germaine. "I can put on a cloak and hood in a minute."

"Nonsense, child!" replied her uncle, "your mother would not think of allowing you to go," and as he was leaving the room Ernestine said anxiously—

"Come back and tell us the news just as soon as you can, Uncle Armand; it is terrible to think there is no hope."

"I shall not lose a moment in letting you know, my dear girl," he answered, and then ran downstairs and found the Doctor with Baptiste and the other servants in the garden. Carrying lighted lanterns, the party set off at once toward the river.

CHAPTER II.

THE storm was at its height, the snow falling heavily, but such was the violence of the wind that the flakes were blown along in whirlwinds before they reached the ground, and the tall chestnut trees swung their branches to and fro, bending and creaking until it seemed as if they must give way before the furious blasts; the pine-trees shivered and rustled with a sound like the rising of the tide, and above them the clouds, parting suddenly, showed the full, round moon, whose melancholy rays momentarily illuminated the wintry landscape.

The Park spread out on either side of the house, and was divided by the river at a distance of two or three hundred feet from the front steps, whence a path led straight to the high beach or bank, which made in summer a delightful promenade, though at present it was anything but agreeable, being fully exposed to the piercing north wind. It was thickly wooded, and the copse which covered the left bank shut out from La Geraldine the view of the Vignemal's house, which, however,

was not picturesque. It was called Le Fougeray, and belonged to the wife, but she had not kept it in repair, and the grounds round it were barren and neglected, as Monsieur Vignemal cared nothing for agricultural pursuits. The woods were entirely devoid of roads, and the trees and shrubs grew without the slightest care, so that the place looked like a wilderness, while the other side of the river—Mme. Dandria's property—had the appearance of the gardens of a villa near Paris. Uncle Armand preferred civilized lands, so he had never crossed the river.

The two gentlemen pushed on through the blinding snow and winds, the Doctor a little in advance, and suddenly the latter slackened his pace to exclaim breathlessly :

“I ought to have told the ladies to have warm blankets ready, but I forgot it; I am getting old, and the news of this strange accident has completely upset me.”

“Strange indeed!” said Mons. Dandria, “it is most extraordinary! What the mischief could those people be thinking of to get into a boat in such a storm? Are there no bridges about here?”

“Yes, there is one farther up the river, but they probably did not want to get out their horses.”

“And such weather to choose to go visiting in! They must have been crazy, and it seems to me that their eccentricity has cost them their life.”

In a few seconds they were at the top of the embankment, which sloped gradually to the river, and in three bounds they reached the beach below. The waters, swelled by the recent rains, were tearing along so boisterously between their steep banks that the usually placid little stream looked like a rushing mountain torrent.

“Great heavens!” cried Mons. Dandria. “Just look at that current! I consider myself a good swimmer, but I should not like to be at the mercy of such a whirlpool.”

“Baptiste,” called the Doctor, “where is Roland?”

“We are looking for him, sir,” replied the man.

“It is not unlikely that he has swam across to his home,” said Doctor Sully.

“His home?” asked Armand. “Where is that?”

“I believe that for the last few weeks he has been living in a hut made of branches, on the left bank of the river, and he has had a little difficulty with the Vignemals on the subject, for Madame objected to his being on her domains. He laughs

at her and her threats, however, and, indeed, no one has ever been able to lay hold of him. I am probably the only person for whom he entertains the slightest regard, and whose advice he deigns to accept. I once treated him for a fractured leg, and he is not ungrateful."

"Was it not here that the ferry used to be, Baptiste?" asked Mons. Dandria.

"Yes, sir," said the man; "there is the path that led to it, and here is a piece of the rope that stretched across the river; you see, one end of it is still fastened to the stake on this bank, so it must have broken in the middle. It was not a strong rope; there ought to have been a new one, but the ferry was so seldom used—"

"And an ocean-cable could hardly have resisted such a hurricane. But the boat cannot have drifted far; go in front with your lantern, Baptiste, and we will look for it. There is Roland running toward us."

"Yes, that is he," said the Doctor, "I know him by his height—he is nearly six feet."

A minute later, Roland Ferrer reached them, and stopping before the Doctor he said, panting,

"I have found the woman."

"Is she alive?" asked Doctor Sully, anxiously.

"I do not know," was the reply.

"What? Then you only saw her drifting by?"

"No. I touched her. I even tried to put her on my back to bring her here, but I could not."

"*Could* not? With your great strength?"

"*Strength* was of no use, sir, for her legs were caught in the roots of an old willow tree on the bank, and I could not free her by myself."

"But you should not have left her; most likely she is dead by this time."

"If she is, it is not my fault," said the poacher, "for I drew her head and shoulders out of the water, and laid her on the bank."

"With her head higher than her feet? that is all right; you did the very best thing that could be done under the circumstances. But there is a bare chance that she may still be breathing, so I must go at once. Is it far from here?"

"A hundred feet or so. You know the place; where the river takes the first turn."

"An ugly spot. The original owner was drowned there."

"It is a perfect whirlpool."

During this dialogue Mons. Dandria had scarcely time to examine the new-comer, this strange youth who had the manners more of a gentleman

than a vagabond ; but he discovered, with the aid of the fitful moonlight, that Roland was tall and of a fine figure, and clothed from head to foot in rabbit skins, like an Esquimaux or Robinson Crusoe.

Before he had stopped speaking, Doctor Sully set off toward the fatal spot, and the rest followed him ; the storm had not begun to subside, but the wind was in their backs ; so they went along quickly.

“ And Monsieur Vignemal ; have you seen nothing of him ? ” asked Armand of Roland, who was a little in advance of him.

“ No,” replied the latter, dryly, turning to stare at the speaker, whom he had never seen before.

“ Then he is dead : let us do all we can for his wife.”

“ I am afraid that she is not much better off than her husband,” said the Doctor.

“ This is the place,” said Roland, stopping suddenly and pointing to an opening in the hedge ; “ there is the willow tree, and the lady is just below on the gravel.”

The Doctor went first and Armand followed, calling to the servants to bring the lantern, as the moon was again obscured by the clouds.

The next instant he exclaimed, impatiently, "Great heavens! The body is not here, Doctor; your young savage has been making game of us."

"Look round carefully, Baptiste; bring the lantern nearer; Roland, where did you leave Mme. Vignemal?" said Doctor Sully, excitedly.

"I left her right there on the bank," replied the young man, leaping down in one bound to the edge of the beach. "I don't understand it," he continued, looking about thoughtfully, "there is the stone that I rested her head upon; but stay, the roots of the tree have been torn away; the current must have dragged the body off too; the tree will soon follow."

"That is true," said the Doctor; "nothing can resist the force of this cursed river. But really, my lad, you did wrong to leave the poor woman here alone; you should have called for help."

"Yes, I see that now," said Roland, "but I trusted to the firmness of the tree."

"Well, she certainly must have been dead when she reached here," said the Doctor, "for she had been in the water for fully twenty minutes. But I would have liked to have an opportunity to try to save her life; now, there is nothing for us to do but to go home."

“Not until I have told this fellow what I think of him,” said Mons. Dandria in an angry tone.

“Are you speaking of me?” asked Roland, in a sharp tone of voice.

“Yes, you rascal, and I want no insolence from you. Your conduct is, to me, very suspicious, and I see no reason to doubt that you have helped *drown* these people whom you pretend to have tried to save.”

Roland recoiled suddenly before this accusation, and for an instant looked like a race-horse about to leap a ditch ; but at a sign from Doctor Sully he cooled down, and answered, quietly—

“You can see that I have risked my life,” pointing to his clothes, which were streaming with water. “I dived three times,” he continued, “and I could easily have stayed in safety on the bank, for no one knew that I was there. Think what you like, however ; perhaps *you* might have saved Mons. and Mme. Vignemal.”

Armand Dandria made no reply, for the young man’s manner had impressed him, and not unfavorably. It could not be possible that he was guilty.

“Let us go up to the Park again,” said the Doctor, “for this ground is not at all firm, and if we

stay here much longer the waters may carry us away too."

They clambered up the bank again with the snow blinding their eyes and the wind nearly taking away their breath; and when they had reached the top, Doctor Sully turned to the young for-ester, and said, kindly—

"There is a good fire in the kitchen of La Geraldine; you must come back with us and dry your clothes."

"It is not necessary, sir," said Roland, "and I would rather go home!"

"Where is your home?"

"Very near here; in the woods, just above the place where the ferry was."

"On the other side of the river, then, and you will have to swim across to your kennel that would not shelter a fox! I will not allow it, my lad."

"But, Monsieur—"

"No excuses. I forbid you to go; and if you disobey me, I promise you that the next time you break your leg—which is not unlikely to happen, thanks to the way you live—you will have to mend it yourself."

The young man was silent, and the Doctor went on :

“ Besides, you will have to give us the details of the accident, as you were the only witness.”

“ That will not take very long,” said Roland, quickly. “ I had just stretched myself in my hut for the night when I heard voices coming toward me, and I thought the keepers from Fougeray were coming to hunt me, but I soon recognized the voices of the Vignemal’s and their servant.”

“ They had a servant with them ! What has become of him, was he drowned too ?”

“ No ; Mons. Vignemal and his wife were on the raft, and the servant stayed to loosen the chain which held it, when suddenly the current broke the rope and carried off the raft, and then the servant began to scream for help.”

“ It was he I heard, then. He called so loudly that his voice reached me in my sister’s drawing-room,” said Mons. Dandria.

“ Very likely, for the wind set in the direction of La Geraldine. But the man did not wait here long, for when he saw the boat spinning round in the water, he lost his head completely and ran away.”

“ He must have gone back to Fougeray,” said

the Doctor, "but it is strange that he did not return with others and make some attempt to rescue his master and mistress. But I have heard that they were not beloved by their servants."

"That is true," said Roland, "and it was for that reason that I went to La Geraldine and not to Fougeray for assistance—after having done all I could by myself."

"You plunged into the river at once, did you not?" asked the Doctor.

"Oh yes, and I thought I could easily save them, for the rope was trailing after the raft, and I had only to take hold of it, and tow them to land."

"Humph! not an easy task, I should think."

"I could have done it, though, for the boat was spinning round like a top, and I soon came near it. I was so close that I saw the two persons on it as plainly as I see you. The gentleman was sitting down and had his hands clasped before his face, and his wife was standing up and seemed to be unfastening the waist of her dress. I thought, too, that she drew out something, I cannot say what."

"Her purse, perhaps. I have heard that she

always carried her papers and bank-checks about her."

"All that I can tell you is, that just as I swam close to them and called out, 'Don't be afraid,' the raft was hurled violently against a rock in the middle of the stream, and I saw it no more."

"But you dived?"

"Yes, and you may be sure that if I came up unsuccessful it was only because success was impossible, for I know the bottom of the river as well as I do its surface. I found nothing, though. . . . I was out of breath, and could not do any more."

"I should think not," said Mons. Dandria, sympathetically, for the young man he had just accused so hotly was beginning to interest him. His discourse seemed to be all candor and simplicity.

"I know very well that you did not desert the unfortunates—you did more than your duty," cried the Doctor; "nothing could resist such a force of water—rescue was impossible. But tell me, Roland, was Mme. Vignemal breathing when you drew her out of the water?"

"I do not think so," he replied, "although I fancied that she made a slight movement when I

touched her ; but I may have been mistaken. The only thing I am quite sure of is, that her hands were clenched tightly, as if she was holding something, and her arms were as stiff as bars of iron."

"Good!" said the Doctor, "now I am certain that she was past help; I could have done nothing for her. Go on before, Roland, and as soon as you have dried and warmed yourself at the fire, you may go back to your burrow if you choose; but I insist on your coming home with us first, for I have something more to say to you—but not out in this weather."

The young man hesitated, and it was very evident that the prospect of drying himself in the great kitchen of La Geraldine was not a tempting one; but he had a great respect for Doctor Sully, and was unwilling to offend him; so, after a moment's silence, he joined the men who were walking in front with the lanterns.

"Where does he hail from, this Robin Hood?" asked Mons. Dandria, in a low tone.

"He came here when he was very young, and his father was a sort of Bohemian (probably from Spain), who went round the country buying old iron and clipping horses for a livelihood, and one day he was found dead on the road-side near Arcy.

The child, who was seated near the corpse, was taken charge of by the Christian Brothers, who brought him up until he had reached his fifteenth year."

"I can guess the rest," said Mons. Dandria. "As soon as he passed his childhood his natural instincts got the upper hand, and he ran away and turned poacher."

"He is not, strictly speaking, a poacher," said the Doctor, "for he does not sell the game he shoots or the fish he catches, but merely takes what suffices for his own support. He cares nothing about money, for he has no use for it; his clothes are made of rabbit-skins and his cap of otter."

"He is an ideal Leather-stocking, and ought to belong in the woods of Canada," said Mons. Dandria. "I have a mind to advise my sister to make a gamekeeper of him."

"He would not accept the position; he is too fond of his wild, free life. Mme. Vignemal tried repeatedly to take him into her service, but he preferred to live in a state of open warfare with her; so she ended by setting her people on his track to arrest him."

"Indeed, I think he is likely to come to a bad

end, Doctor ; a few minutes ago I was convinced that he had helped our unfortunate neighbors out of the world."

"He has spoken the simple truth ; that I will answer for," returned the Doctor ; "for since I have known him he has never once lied to me ; and, at all events, the Vignemals' servant saw the accident ; he will tell exactly what happened."

"Oh, I don't suspect your protégé now—how old is he?"

"He does not know that himself, for he was probably born on the road-side or in the depths of a forest, where there was no magistrate to register the birth ; that is how he has escaped being enlisted."

"And a great pity it is, too, for he would look uncommonly well in a cuirass. I have not been able to see his face very distinctly, but it struck me that it was one of extraordinary beauty—fit for an artist's model. But to return to this mournful business of the Vignemals ; do you think there is nothing more to be done ? Ought we not to notify the mayor of Arcy ?"

"I will be in town in the course of an hour and will attend to that. The mayor will probably have the river dragged, and appoint me to examine the

bodies. But first I must go and take leave of Mme. Dandria and her daughters."

"You will not have the trouble of going upstairs, for I see my nieces standing at the door of the kitchen, and their mother is probably not far off. There they are, talking to Baptiste; I am glad we are not the first ones to tell them the bad news. See, they have gone into the house again, and the men follow them. Come in, Doctor."

The kitchen was as large as a guard-room in a fortress of the Middle Ages, and immense logs, almost whole trees, were blazing in the wide chimney, while three large lamps, suspended from the ceiling, flooded the room with light.

Madame Dandria was not there, but her daughters had just learned the news from the old servant when their uncle and the Doctor entered.

Ernestine, more pale even than usual, and with tears sparkling in her eyes, came up to her uncle, saying:

"Is it true, then, that there is no hope?"

"Yes, my dear," he answered, "they have done everything that possibly could be done. When I say *they* I mean, not myself, for I was too late, and our good Doctor, too—for the river had already carried off the bodies of our unhappy neighbors—

but we have brought with us one who risked his life. Where are you, my lad? Come here and show yourself."

Roland Ferrer, who had been standing in the shadow of the fire-place, came forward, though unwillingly, when Monsieur Dandria called him, and stood in the middle of the room. He held his cap of otter-skin in his hand, and his thick, brown hair rested in natural curls upon a rather low but well-shaped forehead; the features were as straight as those of a Greek statue, the complexion a rich olive, the lips full and red, and the eyes large, and as brilliant as two black diamonds; they were the sort of eyes that *speak*, and they were looking fixedly at Ernestine.

"Heavens! how handsome he is," said Uncle Armand, who never took any pains to conceal his thoughts.

"The Doctor told us so," returned Germaine, going nearer to the young Bohemian, who was not in the least disconcerted by her curious glances, and, indeed, seemed hardly conscious of them. He had no eyes for any one but Ernestine, who, however, was looking at him as one would look at a rare and beautiful bird or a statue, with deep interest, but without any emotion.

Germaine took in his fine face and form instantly, and then, recalling her uncle's words, addressed him with great warmth.

"You risked your life, sir, and I am very glad to know you, and I hope you will often come to La Geraldine. My mother, I am sure, will want to see you, too."

Roland, a little astonished at being called *sir*, looked at her and bowed without speaking, and then Monsieur Dandria added:

"I hope you will not refuse to accompany me the next time I go shooting, for the Doctor tells me you are an expert with the gun and I am very anxious to witness your skill in bringing down some of my sister's game."

"You are very good, sir," stammered the poacher, and Monsieur Dandria went on—

"If you do not come I shall go for you, for I am determined that we shall shoot together, and if the weather prevents our going out you can stay here and my nieces will take your portrait."

"That is, Ernestine will take it," put in Germaine smiling, and the elder sister added, evasively—

"We must first see whether mamma will like the plan——"

"I will arrange that," cried Uncle Armand, "and Roland, I shall expect you to come, remember."

"I will come, sir," said Roland, after a pause.

"Don't keep me waiting, or else I shall think that you bear me malice for certain sharp words which I regret having spoken."

"Oh, Roland is too sensible to give them a thought," said the Doctor, briskly, "and if you take my advice," he added, turning to his protégé, "you will stay at La Geraldine to-night, or else, beware of pleurisy! Besides, you will have to come to me at Arcy to-morrow morning to explain the details of the accident to the magistrate; and, as you are not in the odor of sanctity with the authorities, they may require some guaranty for your sincerity."

"I will come to you before noon," said Roland, without stating whether or not he intended to accept the hospitality of La Geraldine for the night; and as the ladies and gentlemen turned to leave the room he bowed to them with easy grace, and then stood leaning back against the chimney-piece.

Ernestine merely returned his bow, but Ger

maine smiled and waved her small white hand at him, before following her sister up the stairs.

“Well, do you think you have found your hero, Germaine?” asked her uncle, “does his appearance suit you?”

“It suits me too well,” she answered, “for I intended to *marry* my hero, and I could not think of marrying a wild man of the woods.”

“You had better give up all thoughts of *this* hero,” said Monsieur Dandria, willing to carry on the joke, “for he hardly looked at you, but kept his glance fixed on Ernestine; he seemed to be devouring her face with his eyes.”

“I did not know that I made such an impression on him,” said Ernestine, quietly; and just then they heard their mother’s voice, asking anxiously, “What news?”

“Bad news, my dear Queen,” replied her brother.

“Drowned? Both dead?” she cried as they came up the stair-case.

“Yes, they are gone, and God only knows when the bodies will be found, for the river empties into the sea.”

“Oh, they will not be carried as far as that,” cried the Doctor, “for when the water begins to subside they will probably be stranded some-

where, and indeed it would be unfortunate if the deaths could not be fully proved."

"Yes, unfortunate for that lad who behaved so bravely, but who will perhaps be accused," said Monsieur Dandria; "but I will help you to defend him, Doctor; I will answer for him, though I confess he did not inspire me with confidence at first."

The dialogue, begun in the passage, ended in front of the drawing-room fire. Madame Dandria listened, trembling nervously, and her daughters tried in vain to calm her.

"Really, Queen, you excite yourself unnecessarily," said her brother, "I am sincerely sorry for the death of Monsieur and Madame Vignemal, but I have never laid eyes on them, nor have you——"

"I ought to have had the ferry repaired."

"Why so? You never used it; and, what is more, I discovered only the other day, while looking over some of your deeds, that the ferry did not belong to this estate at all, but to Fougeray; so you have nothing to reproach yourself with, and you had better leave it to the Vignemal's heirs to mourn their death," he said, philosophically.

"I hardly think that they will shed many tears,"

said the Doctor, slowly, "for I only know of one heir, and he is estranged almost entirely from his Uncle Vignemal, and quite so from his aunt-in-law. She led her husband by the nose——"

"You mean Arthur du Pourméval; but how can he inherit? It seems that this loving pair arranged by will that the whole fortune should go to whichever survived the other. Now, the wife perished at the same time as her husband; can you tell me which of the two actually lived the longest?"

"No, but the law provides for such an emergency. In default of positive proof to the contrary the succession is settled according to the respective ages of the deceased."

"I forget how that is, but I imagine that the younger would be supposed to survive the longest—is not that the most natural conclusion?"

"Not always, for if both were under fifteen years of age the elder would probably be the stronger of the two."

"Ah, yes, but our neighbors were both considerably over fifteen."

"The husband was fifty-five and the wife fifty-four, at least; there was not more than six months difference in their ages."

“And if the husband were the elder the wife would inherit.”

“I cannot say as to that, with any certainty; I am not sufficiently familiar with the law; but it strikes me that the question not only of age but also of *sex* would be considered.”

“Oh, Armand,” said Madame Dandria, reproachfully. “I do not see how you can have the heart to be discussing the question of inheritance so soon after this fearful tragedy. What is it to us who inherits the fortune?”

“It is a matter of interest to some one we know, and as I was not acquainted with the parties deceased it is only natural that I should be anxious to know what chance our friend Pourméval stands of becoming a millionaire. He is a very good sort of fellow.”

“He leads the german most delightfully,” said Germaine, mischievously, and her uncle answered—

“A good leader of the german may possess more desirable qualities also, miss; but at present the question is, Will he be the master of Fougeray or not?”

“I shall be able to tell you to-morrow, for in a small place like Arcy news spreads rapidly,” said the Doctor.

“We could decide the question now, if we only had a code, but these girls read nothing but novels, and I only the newspapers——”

“A code, uncle?” said Ernestine, “my brother has one; I saw it lying on his table. Shall I get it for you?”

“Yes, dear, do,” he answered; and as she left the room he turned to Germaine, saying—

“You do not care much for law-books, do you? I dare say you do not even know what a code looks like.”

“I beg your pardon, uncle, it is a big book with the edges of the leaves all different colors; but, indeed, I have never opened it; my code is here,” she added, laying her hand on her heart.

“And if you follow its teachings you are not likely to go wrong,” said Uncle Armand; “but don’t listen to that child, Doctor; tell me, who are Madame Vignemal’s heirs?”

“Oh, there are several of them—four cousins. Her father made his money in trade, but all her other relations are country people and she did not acknowledge them. There was one exception, though, an orphan whom she adopted and intended to educate for the bar; perhaps she thought he would be useful in pleading for her, as she was

always at law with her neighbors. But she soon lost interest in the young fellow, for he displayed no taste for the law, and on finishing his studies he left Paris, without returning here at all, and I believe the truant Roger has not been heard of since."

"*Roger?*" said Germaine, "was that his first name?"

"Yes, Roger Pontac."

"That is a pretty name," she said, "so simple and short. And does no one know where he is now?"

"No one has cared to inquire, but I think his aunt imagines that he has enlisted; he was a strong, energetic fellow, and never knew what fear was."

"Perhaps he will come back a general some day, and that will be better than having Madame Vignemal's money," said the girl; and at that moment her sister came into the room carrying a large book.

"Thank you, dear," said Uncle Armand, "it is a heavy load for you; let me take it. Why, Alfred has not read this very much; the leaves are not cut," he added, putting down the great volume on the table; "will you find the article, Doctor?"

“It would come under the head of Succession; let me see, this is it, Book Third, Article 720.”

“Arthur du Pourméval little thinks what trouble we are taking on his account,” said Armand, while the Doctor turned over the leaves of the book.

“Listen,” said the latter, suddenly; “this is what Article 720 says: ‘If two persons, inheriting reciprocally, meet their death in the same accident, and it is not known with certainty which of the two died first, the law decides the question of inheritance by the following circumstances of age and sex.’ Article 721 says that, ‘if the parties are under fifteen years of age the elder is presumed to have survived the longer; but if they are between the ages of fifteen and sixty the younger one is supposed to have been the survivor——’”

“Then madame’s heirs will inherit, and Pourméval will get nothing,” cried Monsieur Dandria, impatiently.

“Wait a minute; the article adds, however, ‘*if they are of the same sex.*’”

“And if not?”

“Then the male is always supposed to have lived the longest, if the difference in the ages did not exceed one year.”

“The deuce! that alters the case entirely, for

Madame Vignemal was only six months younger than her husband, you say, Doctor."

"Yes, hardly six months; our young friend will be a rich man, after all."

"How much do the Vignemal's leave?"

"They were said to have an income of fifty thousand francs, and as they lived so very economically their capital must have been nearly doubled. Madame's heirs will probably contest the will, but they will lose their case, for there can be no question as to the decision of the court; and as for Roger Pontac, he would not make any claim, even if he knew of his aunt's death—which he is not at all apt to do—for he is a gay, careless fellow who does not long for wealth. The money would be much better in young Pourméval's hands."

"Come, come, Doctor, you know that Arthur is fond of spending his money."

"Oh, yes, but he will get over that. All he needs is to find a good, sensible girl, with some firmness of character——"

"Then he will never knock at my door!" cried Germaine, bursting out laughing; but Ernestine blushed hotly, Madame Dandria bit her lips, Uncle Armand frowned impatiently, and the good

Doctor saw that he was going too fast and too far.

"It is getting very late," he said, hurriedly, "I will bid you good-night."

"Oh, wait and have a cup of tea," said Armand, as Baptiste entered with the tray, "and meanwhile they will get out the coupé—you cannot return to town on foot." Then turning to the servant he asked, "has that lad Roland had some supper?"

"No, sir, he would not take anything, but ran out of the house as if he was mad."

"I shall never succeed in taming my savage," said Doctor Sully, shaking his head and sighing deeply.

"I am afraid he will not let us paint his portrait," added Germaine, as they sat down to tea.

CHAPTER III.

THE cold weather seldom lasts long in the northwest of France. It rains a great deal in the autumn but rarely freezes, and about the first of November the beautiful *St. Martin's summer* begins.

The storm which had been the cause of the Vignemal's tragic death had disappeared entirely when the dawn broke next day; the sun's first rays melted the snow, the air was balmy, the sky blue, and the river was fast sinking to its natural bounds.

At La Geraldine every one got up late that morning, and during breakfast they talked of nothing but the catastrophe of the previous day, so that the meal was a very gloomy one. There was no fresh news, for neither the Doctor nor Roland Ferrer had returned, and the bodies had not been found, though the servants had searched carefully along the river's bank for more than a mile.

At last Uncle Armand proposed that he and the girls should go for a ride, by way of diverting

their minds from the painful event of the day before.

Their mother at first opposed the plan, but was finally persuaded to give her consent, though reluctantly, and Germaine flew off to tell her sister to get ready. She delighted in out-door exercise of all kinds, and would gladly accompany her uncle on his shooting expeditions if she had been allowed; Ernestine, on the other hand, preferred less violent amusements, though she seldom opposed the wishes of her sister and uncle. In an hour's time the party was ready to mount, and Madame Dandria came out to see them go.

Germaine looked perfectly charming in a habit of dark blue cloth and a felt hat with a very wide brim—an old Gainsborough which she had pressed into the service for this occasion—for Madame Dandria had never thought it necessary to provide fashionable equestrian attire for her daughters, as they were not accustomed to riding in the Bois de Boulogne or the Champs-Élysées, as did the lovers of society and the American residents of Paris. She had not educated them for “high life,” but had expected them to marry men in their own sphere.

Ernestine's habit was black, and she wore a

little, low hat of her brother's, which was very becoming to her, and as for Monsieur Dandria, he was dressed in a short jacket, corduroy trousers, top-boots, and a round cap; he sat his horse well, having had long practice; his figure was strong and erect, his eyes bright, his teeth white and perfect, and his beard but slightly tinged with grey. At first sight no one would have guessed his age to be a day more than forty. He rode one of the two grey mares that belonged to Madame Dandria's barouche, patient, gentle creatures who were good enough for riding, provided no very lengthy galloping was expected of them.

Ernestine was on the other mare, but Germaine had chosen for her own use a fine bay of her brother's, a blood-horse which young Dandria claimed to have broken-in himself, and which he boasted would go for twelve hours together without resting, and leap a hedge five feet high.

Uncle Armand had not much confidence in his nephew, and would have preferred to ride the bay himself, but the animal was not strong enough to bear his weight, and, besides that, Germaine was so anxious to try it herself that he decided to let her have her way.

"Do not be late, I beg you," said Madame

Dandria, who was not a little disquieted to see Germaine's horse pawing the ground impatiently.

"Oh, we shall not go far," replied her brother; "these girls are very anxious to be off, but when they have trotted for an hour or two they will be quite ready to come home, I dare say."

"We shall see about that," said Germaine in an undertone, and then the little cavalcade set out, Ernestine riding between her uncle and sister.

"Where shall we go, young ladies?" asked their uncle; "it is all very well to ride, but one should have an object—shall we go to town? We might see the Doctor and ask him the news."

"Perhaps we ought not to be seen riding in Arcy to-day," said Ernestine, "it would look as if we had very little sympathy for Monsieur du Pourméval's loss."

"Indeed I think he is not likely to grieve very deeply over an accident which makes him a rich man," said Armand, "but still you are right, Ernestine; our presence in Arcy might occasion remark; people would perhaps say that we were in great haste to find out whether our friend was to inherit—they are such gossips, these provincials; it is better to give them no opportunity for being

ill-natured. But if we do not go to Arcy the only other ride is along the banks of the river."

"Oh, no, uncle!" cried Germaine, "don't let us go near the Beuvron, for we might see the bodies of our unfortunate neighbors, and that would be worse than meeting Monsieur du Pourméval."

"Well, where *shall* we go?" he asked, good-naturedly, "I myself have no preference, but I know that the roads in this neighborhood are very rough and dangerous, and if one of our horses came back with a broken knee your mother would say it was my fault."

"If you will leave it to me I will take you to the loveliest place you have ever seen," said Germaine.

"What place is that?" asked Monsieur Dandria.

"Lamon Rock," she answered.

"What is that?"

"Do you mean to say you have lived at La Geraldine all this time, and do not know where Lamon Rock is!"

"I have never even heard of it before," he replied. "I know the Tertre woods, because they belong to your mother, and I have shot excellent woodcock there, and the Forest Brétêche where, unfortunately, I am not admitted, but as for your Lemon Rock--"

“*Lamon*, if you please, not *lemon*,” interrupted Germaine, “but let us go there at once. Turn to the right;—and on the way I will tell you the legend connected with this rock.”

“A legend, oh that is delightful; but tell me first how far off is this romantic spot?”

“Not more than a mile, and the road is really beautiful; right through the woods you like so much on account of the woodcock; then into a wild rocky gorge, with a rushing stream at the bottom of it; but that is nothing compared to the rock itself. Imagine, uncle, a great wall of granite rising above a mass of foliage like the Alps or Pyrenees—in miniature; and then, when you have climbed up this precipice, you can see over the whole forest of Brétèche, even as far as the chateau of the Duke of Bretteville. It is the grandest view that can be had for ten miles round.”

“That chateau is hardly more than a shooting-box,” said Monsieur Dandria, “and the Duke, being too old to hunt, visits it very seldom. But he is here now, Pourméval tells me, and we were thinking of going to see him and asking for permission to hunt his roe-bucks. But I hear that he has just lost his only son.”

“Yes, in Tunis—the newspapers mentioned his

death; he was killed while making an attack at the head of his squadron. But now I want to tell you the legend."

"Where did you hear it, Germaine?" asked Ernestine.

"From Monsieur du Pourméval. He usually talks about nothing but races and jockeys; but the other day he saw that I was tired of that subject, so he told me stories instead, and this is one of them."

" ' In the very middle of Lamon Rock there is a cleft that reaches from the top all the way down to the bottom, like a great gash; and of course this cleft is an air-hole for the infernal regions. Inside this granite palace live fairies, who guard precious stones of all kinds—diamonds, rubies, and emeralds—heaps and heaps of them. These fairies keep, besides, terrible storms chained up; but when they are in a bad humor they let out the winds that blow over the hills, tearing down trees and houses—' "

"And capsizing people who are crossing streams on rafts," put in Uncle Armand.

"Wait, I have not finished yet," she said: "' And when a girl wants to know the name of the man she is to marry she has only to put her mouth

close to the hole in the rock and whisper her *own* name, and in a minute she will hear a soft, elfin voice answering *George*, or *Edmund*, or whoever it may be. Then it is settled; she is sure to fall in love with the one whom the fairies have named for her, and, what is more, he will love her, too, and they will get married.' ”

“ Well—really, that is not a bad idea,” laughed Uncle Armand. “ The love-sick swain has only to hide behind the rock when his beloved one is approaching, and the thing is done.”

“ Oh, uncle, you don't believe in anything.”

“ I believe that there are girls foolish enough to consult this oracle, and I hope you are not one of them.”

“ I won't promise that,” said Germaine.

“ Oh, for shame! You would never find Ernestine coming to Lamon Rock with her love affairs.”

“ Because she has none,” said Germaine.

“ And you have, I suppose,” cried Uncle Armand, laughing.

“ No, but I should like to have,” she answered.

“ Then, if I were a handsome young man, like Arthur du Pourméval, for instance, I know what

I would do; I would go close to the fairy speaking-tube——”

“You would only lose time,” said Germaine “but here we are in the middle of the woods. Is it not grand? Those beech trees look like great marble columns against the yellow foliage: ‘*Le soleil et la pluie ont rouillé la forêt.*’ Where have I seen that line, Ernestine?”

“It is Victor Hugo’s,” answered Ernestine.

“I thought so. Ah, if he had only seen Lamon Rock he would have written still more beautiful verses, and I would have learned them by heart.”

“And recited them to us every day, I dare say,” said her uncle, “but just now I wish you would be quiet for a moment and let me listen. I think there is some one in the bushes close beside us.”

“I heard a noise like cracking twigs a few minutes ago, uncle, but it has stopped now, and I think it was a buck we started.”

“There are no bucks here,” said Mons. Dandria. “I wish there were; Brétèche is full of them.”

“Then it is a hare.”

“I think it is a man.”

“A poacher, perhaps. And who knows, it might be Doctor Sully’s friend!” cried Germaine, delightedly.

“He would have no reason for concealing himself—I invited him to go out shooting with me.”

“And he need not be ashamed to show himself,” said the younger girl, “for he is too handsome for anything. Such gorgeous, brilliant eyes! They seemed to be really flashing; if he had looked at me as he did at Ernestine I should have caught fire!”

“I am not so inflammable,” said Ernestine.

“I am almost sorry for having made any advances to that peculiar person,” said Mons. Dandria, “for I have been reflecting on it all night long, and the more I think of the accident in the river, the more I suspect him of hypocrisy. He declares that he leaped in to save the lady and gentleman, but no one saw him do it; he says that he drew Mme. Vignemal from the river and laid her on the bank, but when we got there she was gone, and we have only his word for it that he did not throw her back into the water.”

“But, uncle, what object could he have had for committing such a crime?” cried Germaine. “He would not have done it so as to let Mons. du Pourméval inherit, for he does not know him; and besides that, he has never studied the *civil code*, I am sure.”

"I dare say he would not know or care anything about the question of succession," said her uncle, "but he must have hated Mme. Vignemal, who had tried to have him seized for trespassing and poaching. If I were a magistrate I would throw him into prison until he was ready to confess."

"I cannot believe that this Roland is a murderer," said Ernestine, gently, "for Dr. Sully has interested himself in him——"

"Hush!" cried Mons. Dandria stopping his mare suddenly, "that time I heard it plainly. I am certain that there is some one creeping along in the thicket—listen!"

The girls stopped their horses and looked in the direction of their uncle's eager glance.

The copse which bordered the road did not extend far, and beyond it grew herbs and ferns, and these were waving gently in the breeze. No one would have thought for an instant that they could have concealed a man, however, and not a sound was to be heard in the forest.

"You have made a mistake, uncle, there is no one here but ourselves," said Germaine, in a low tone.

"There is, I am sure of it," Uncle Armand in-

sisted; "some one has been following us ever since we came into the woods."

"But who could it be? Robbers? That is not likely, and no one that I know of would want to spy on us; we are not conspirators."

"I do not pretend to say who it is, but that some one is concealed in those bushes I am perfectly positive, and if the branches did not hang so low I would ride over there and find out. But I have thought of a better plan and shall put it in practice at once—ride on."

"I could not have held Ralph much longer, he was getting so impatient," said Germaine when they had been trotting for a few minutes in silence.

"The road is becoming very bad, are you sure you know the way to your fairy rock? Have you been to it before?"

"No, uncle, but Dr. Sully described the road so closely that I could not mistake if I tried."

"Do you mean to say that it was the Doctor who put this idea into your head? Well, I had a better opinion of his common sense; but since I have come upon this wild-goose chase I suppose I must see it to the end—that is, when I have settled accounts with this individual who dogs our steps. I should like to know what his object is."

"Perhaps it is Ernestine or I. Perhaps he is an admirer; what fun that would be, so romantic! But I don't believe that any of our Arcy friends would think it worth while to run the length of these woods for the pleasure of looking at us between the twigs and leaves. At all events I am sure Mons. du Pourméval would not."

"Why do you always like to drag *his* name in?" asked Ernestine.

"So as to give you the pleasure of defending him, for I know you like nothing better," said her sister, teasingly.

"Listen to me," interrupted Uncle Armand, in a half whisper. "Do you see that path that crosses the road we are on? Ride on together and I will stop to arrange my saddle, and then mount again and hide behind that large oak that stands just where the two roads meet. If the person who is following us attempts to cross the path I will give him chase, but if he does not appear I will soon overtake you. Wait for me on the border of the forest."

"But suppose the man should attack you," said Germaine.

"You need not be afraid of that," he answered, "for I never go without my revolver; but I have

no idea that I shall have occasion to use it, so you need not worry about me."

Germaine was going to insist, but he made her a sign to be quiet, and then raising his voice said in a tone loud enough to be heard at some distance—

"Confound it, my saddle is loose; I shall have to get down and tighten the girths. But you need not wait for me, I shall soon overtake you."

The two girls obeyed him, though unwillingly, and as soon as they had passed the cross-road looked behind them more than once; they saw Mons. Dandria leap into his saddle again and then ride behind the oak tree, which was large enough to effectually conceal him.

"What a singular idea of uncle's," said Ernestine.

"Yes, and what possible good can it do?" returned her sister. "If there is really a man hiding in the copse he will certainly see through Uncle Armand's manœuvre and make his escape in the opposite direction."

"So much the better if he does."

"But I should like to see him," said Germaine.

"I should not!" cried Ernestine.

"Why, it would be delightful—such an adventure, and adventures are so rare! And there is no

doubt that some one is hiding in the copse, I heard him plainly ; and it is no poacher I am convinced ; but who can it be ? I am tempted to believe that one of us has turned the head of some country fellow who takes us for goddesses.”

“ Oh, Germaine, you are always getting up some romantic idea ; have you no common sense at all ? ”

“ You are so very wise yourself, Ernestine, I advise you to get married at once ; and, by the way, since we are talking about marrying, tell me, would you have Arthur du Pourméval ? ”

“ Really, Germaine, I have never thought of such a possibility,” replied the elder sister.

“ Well, you will have to think of it one of these days, for Arthur thinks of no one but you, that I *know* ; and now that he is to come into a fortune he will soon offer himself to you.”

“ I shall wait until he does so to give him his answer,” said Ernestine, quietly.

“ Naturally,” laughed Germaine, “ but you must know already what you would say to mamma if she came to you and told you that the master of Fougeray had asked her for your hand.”

“ What would you say if he asked for yours ? ” retorted Ernestine.

“That is a nice way to try and evade my question. But I will be more frank than you, sister. If Mons. du Pourméval should give me the preference and ask me to marry him, I should be very much embarrassed, indeed, for I have not anything against him, and I know that he would be a splendid match, but I do not love him. It would be a mercenary marriage. They say that such marriages are often very happy ones, but I don’t believe it; still, if he asked me I would think of it; I have not decided yet.”

“And neither have I,” said Ernestine.

“But you ought to decide, because you are the elder—oh!” she cried, suddenly, “Ralph wants to go on, he is gnawing the bridle, my hands ache with holding him—I wish uncle would come. Do you see anything of him?”

“No, he is still behind the oak. It was foolish of you, Germaine, to ride that horse.”

“Oh, nonsense, I am strong enough to hold him, and I would rather walk than ride that creature you are on. Whip her up and I will let Ralph trot a little.”

Ernestine made the attempt, but it was useless, the mare only quickened its pace a little and declined to trot.

The road was growing worse at almost every step, for the forest was on the side of a hill, the steep descent of which would have made it difficult for even a pedestrian to keep his footing. Beyond the forest was open ground, it is true, but it was hardly less dangerous to travel over, for it was one mass of mounds and furrows, the Lamon Rock being the culminating point. The young girls were suddenly surprised to see before them heaps of rocks without end as far as the eye could reach, and huge blocks of stone scattered here and there as if uplifted and hurled along by some antediluvian cataclysm.

Ernestine hastened to draw up her steed, who, indeed, displayed no impatience to investigate this formidable place, but Germaine's horse plainly evinced by his behavior that he was going to do as he liked; he advanced a few steps, sniffing the air with distended nostrils, then tried to take the bit between his teeth.

Germaine held him until her arms ached, and then cried to Ernestine, laughingly—

“*Sister Anne, sister Anne, do you see any one coming?*” If uncle stands there on duty much longer Ralph will run away with me. I have a great mind to let him gallop a little, he is *so* restless.”

“Oh, don’t,” said Ernestine, “for we should never be able to overtake you; besides, uncle is coming—I hear a noise; hark!”

“Yes, but it is in the bushes; Ralph hears it, too. I am afraid he is going to rear; I shall have to let him go.”

The sound, which grew louder every moment, was not that of a horse, for it came from the copse as Germaine had said. The twigs crackled loudly, as if some animal were breaking through, and the horse, Ralph, starting to one side so suddenly that Germaine had the greatest difficulty to keep her seat, set off on a mad gallop down the rocky pathway. At the same instant a man sprang out of the copse and caught hold of the bridle of Ernestine’s mare.

It was Roland Ferrer; bare-headed, his hair flowing about his face, and his eyes fixed on hers.

“Let go of my bridle,” she said, as calmly as she could, for the ardent gaze of this young Bohemian was, under the circumstances, anything but reassuring.

He dropped the bridle at her command, but did not move an inch; and Ernestine, gathering courage, asked, with a frown of displeasure—

“What do you mean by following us?”

“It was only you I followed,” he answered, slowly. I did it for the pleasure of seeing you ; I do it every time you go out.”

“If I had known that——” she began, hotly, but he interrupted her, saying—

“If you had known it you would have forbidden me to do it again ; that is why I concealed myself.”

“I forbid you now ; and what is more, Mons. Dandria will be here directly.”

“I have just escaped him,” said Roland, smiling, “and I can do it again, but first I must speak to you, mademoiselle.”

Ernestine was shaking with fright, for there were no signs of her uncle. Germaine was out of sight and hearing, and she, herself, was alone with this strange being.

True, he was Doctor Sully’s protégé and was *supposed* to have risked his life to save the Vignemals ; but, on the other hand, he was but a rover and outlaw, a creature who feared nothing, and knew no law but his own will. However it would not do to lose courage, and Ernestine Dandria had presence of mind and self-control sufficient at her command.

“If you wish to speak to me, why do you not come to La Geraldine ?” she asked, coldly.

"Because I would not be able to see you alone."

"And what can *you* have to say to *me* in private?"

"That I love you," he answered, boldly.

The blood rose to Ernestine's face at this audacious declaration, and indignation took the place of fear, for her woman's instinct told her that she stood in no immediate danger, since she had to deal with a man who was as yet only sentimental.

"You? *you*?" she cried disdainfully, "*you* love *me*?"

"Yes, madly!" he returned.

"You must indeed be mad to *dare* to speak to me like this—and you will repent your boldness, I assure you."

"It is out of my power *not* to love you, and I only ask you to listen to me; after that you can say what you choose, but you *must* hear me; I have been waiting three years for an opportunity to speak to you."

"*Three years!*" she echoed "why, I never knew of your existence until last night; I never saw you before then in my life."

"But I see you every day—while you are at La Geraldine. It is because you spend the Summer and Autumn here that I remain."

“ I am very much flattered at your remaining,” she said, with a contemptuous smile, “ and I should be obliged to you if you would tell me what you expect to gain by persecuting me in this way.”

“ I expect nothing,” he replied.

“ What do you want, then ?”

“ I want to obey you, as a dog obeys his master.”

“ Well, if you are so foolish, stay there while I go back to meet my uncle.”

“ No, I have nothing more to say to you, so I will go ; but remember that I am your slave, and you have only to command me even if you want me to kill any one—”

“ I do not desire the death of any one, I assure you,” she replied.

“ My own life is at your service. I exposed it yesterday to spare you a shock.

“ Me ?” she cried in astonishment.

“ Yes, you. I hated the Vignemals, but I knew that they must be going to La Geraldine when they tried to cross the river, and I did my best to save them because I believed that their death would distress you.”

Ernestine did not reply for a moment ; for she was very much surprised and a little touched at

the young man's words ; and then she answered gently—

“ You would have done better to prevent their going on the raft at all.”

“ That is true,” he murmured, “ I did not think of you in time ;” and this reply turned her thoughts suddenly in a different direction. She saw the young man before her and the accident of the preceding day in an entirely new light. She had not time to reflect on the matter, however, for her uncle was approaching ; the horses' hoofs could be heard clattering on the loose stones, though a sharp turn in the road prevented her from seeing him.

“ Go !” she said to Roland, “ I would not like my uncle to find you here.”

“ I am going,” he replied still keeping his eyes fixed adoringly upon her face, “ and I will not trouble you again with my presence until you call me. If you ever have need of me, put your lamp in your bed-room window at night, and then walk along the river-bank to the end of the hedge—”

“ How do you know which is my window ?” she asked, without seeming to have noticed that he had named a trysting-place.

“ Because it was there that I first saw you,” he

said, "and since then I have spent many a night looking toward it," and as he stopped speaking he seized her gloved hand which held her riding-whip and pressed it to his lips, covering it with kisses, before she could prevent him. Then he bounded like a deer into the woods again, and the next minute Monsieur Dandria appeared.

"The rascal has made his escape," he said, unconscious that the object of his search was so near him, "but I have put a stop to his following us, and I shall tell your mother that she is very foolish to let strange men live on her lands; they will be coming into the garden next. But what ails you, child, you are so pale?"

Ernestine would doubtless have told him of her interview with Roland, but he suddenly missed Germaine and it was but natural that she should first answer his anxious inquiries.

"Germaine could not hold Ralph any longer, he was so restless, and they have just gone off at full speed."

"Good heavens!" he cried, "and this is such a frightful road; but she is very brave, and a good rider too; I wonder, though, Ernestine, that you did not follow her."

"I could not; the mare will not gallop."

“And mine will not either, unfortunately, but we can trot, and as there is only one road to follow we will surely overtake her.”

But he had reckoned without his host, for while he was speaking Germaine was galloping, sorely against her will, over a wild, rocky country which would have appalled the most inveterate fox hunter.

The path ran down to the river-side after many abrupt turns; so Germaine, on seeing a cross-road leading *up-hill*, turned her horse's head in that direction, hoping that the long, steep ascent would soon exhaust him. She knew that Ralph was a wild, unmanageable beast, who had more than once come near breaking his young master's neck; but these adventures had been confided by Albert Dandria to his younger sister only, and it had long been her highest ambition to test her horsemanship on Ralph's back.

Now her one thought was to keep her seat, and it seemed as if she would succeed, for Ralph was beginning to slacken his pace a little, though he still kept on at a gallop.

Unfortunately, however, the hill he was climbing was but the beginning of a gigantic rock staircase formed by some volcanic upheaval, and

between the ascents were deep ravines, whose steep sides were covered with boulders of various sizes.

What was Germaine's dismay, then, on reaching the top of the first hill to see at her feet a frightful gorge! The road ran round the edge. Ralph took a deep breath and dashed along where a single mis-step, a single loose stone, would send horse and rider into the abyss. Germaine closed her eyes, but held the reins firmly. She was a girl of spirit in every sense of the word, and, though giddy and thoughtless on the surface, possessed more strength of character, more serious qualities, than she was herself aware of. Although twenty years of age she was still a child at heart, for the *occasion* had not yet presented itself for her to show of what she was capable. That occasion, to a young girl, is Love, of which Germaine could speak only by hearsay, for she had not yet bestowed her affections.

She cared only for dancing and dress and music, and it seemed unlikely that she would ever care for anything else, though she looked on marriage as a thing that had to be—some time in the dim future; she was in no hurry. Occasionally

she would express herself on the subject, much to the amusement of her mother and uncle.

“I would like to have some one in love with me,” she said one day when no one was thinking of such matters. It was as if she had remarked—

“I would like to see Niagara Falls,” and the next minute she had forgotten all about it.

She was nowhere so happy as at La Geraldine, where she often ran round the Park until she was out of breath, while her sister was quietly drawing under her mother’s directions; and for three months she had been scheming by herself how to contrive to ride her brother’s horse.

And now that she had succeeded in her designs she did not repent her folly, for her momentary fright having passed away she became fascinated by the sight of her own danger. There was a romance, too, about it that delighted her, for she was being carried she knew not where—perhaps to an enchanted palace where she would meet Prince Charming himself; an unknown land was certainly before her, and as the fresh breeze played about her and fanned her cheek, she felt that she had never lived till now.

She could hear the running of a brook at the bottom of the gorge; all round her lay huge

blocks of granite as if thrown there by a Titan's hand ; here and there rose a tall pine, a great black spot on the dull grey background, and on every side the eye was met by steep cliffs and yawning chasms. It seemed to Germaine that she had reached the end of the world.

Suddenly Ralph, in one leap, reached the top of the steep rise, and the girl found herself on a vast table-land, the same wall of rock on her left hand, the deep ravine on her right, and before her a mass of heath stretching for at least three hundred yards, to where an immense rock rose in solitary grandeur.

Ralph at once made toward this obstacle, and as the land continued to rise Germaine soon had the satisfaction of feeling that her steed was fast becoming exhausted ; and when he had reached the summit of the hill he stopped short, completely out of breath, and trembling in every nerve.

His rider lost not a moment in springing to the ground, and she was too much delighted at finding herself safe and sound to think of administering any punishment, however well it might be deserved. On the contrary, she gathered a handful of ferns, and began rubbing down the heated an-

imal with as much zest as if she had been a groom by profession.

That done, she laid her hand upon his neck and talked to him. "Do you know, sir, that you have come very near killing me? What will your master say to you when I tell him?"

Ralph looked at her earnestly, and then answered by a neigh of gratitude that made her smile.

"And now, how are we going to get home, do you think?" she went on. "I shall not trust myself on your back again; don't think it! I have a great mind to leave you here alone, and let the wolves eat you. But come, I will begin by tying you up, as if you were a restive pony."

Doubtless Ralph understood what she said to him, for he followed her meekly to a tree, where she tied him securely. "Now, the question is," she said to herself when the horse was disposed of, "what am I going to do next. I do not feel at all inclined to stay here all night, but I cannot leave Ralph, for Alfred would make a terrible scene if I were to lose his horse. I could lead him home by the bridle if I were sure that I could find the way; but then I forgot to drop pebbles as I

came along as the Princess in the fairy-tale did. I don't know where I am at all."

She looked round her anxiously but in a moment her face brightened again, and she said gaily.

"Why should I worry myself? Ernestine will have told Uncle Armand of Ralph's behavior, and they will have set out long ago to find me. They will be here before long, and meanwhile I can admire the view."

She glanced up at the huge rock before her, adding, "It is a perfect castle, turrets, battlements and all, I have never seen anything so natural—and that great cleft in the middle, why! I believe,—can it be? Yes, it is Lamon Rock itself! Ralph must have known where I wanted to go!"

She examined the rock with renewed interest, and then prepared to climb its steep side.

"I may as well amuse myself by completing my pilgrimage, and speaking into the fairies' tunnel; it will do no harm at all events, and besides, from the top of the rock I can see uncle and Ernestine coming all the sooner," and without more delay she gathered up her long riding-skirt and began the steep ascent, and after a few minutes' scrambling reached the top, breathless and rosy.

Here a lovely panorama met her astonished

gaze—a wide, seemingly endless forest of venerable oaks, and at a short distance the gray towers of a castle peeping out among the tree-tops.

“The forest of Bretèche and the Duke de Bretteville’s castle,” she murmured, after a moment; “I had no idea I was so near it—how grand, how beautiful! How miserably small and mean La Geraldine seems compared to this lordly domain.”

She stood a moment wrapped in admiration, then turned away saying, “If it were mine how I would roam through that forest—but it is not mine and never will be, unless indeed the old duke takes it into his head to offer me his hand. But then I would not take such an old husband; I want some one young, no matter whether he is rich or poor—and now the fairies shall tell me his name,” she added, laughing and going toward the magic spot.

It occurred to her, however, to look in the direction she had come, to see whether her uncle and sister were not in sight, but there was no one to be seen, and indeed the high cliffs would have concealed any one who might be on the difficult path which she, or rather Ralph, had taken. Then for the first time she asked herself what she should

do if her uncle did not come at all; suppose he could not find her, and had followed some other road?

Should she be obliged to stay out here all night, or what would become of her? She had never been so far from home alone; the sky was clouding over and the dead silence of the place was oppressive. Not even a bird's note to be heard; not a living creature to be seen anywhere. And the yawning fissure in the rock had a strange, unearthly look. It was large enough to admit a man's body, and it seemed as if a giant hand had cleft the rock from top to base. The girl looked down timidly; all was inky blackness; she could not see the bottom of the chasm, but near the top on a natural shelf of rock were bunches of dead flowers, faded ribbons, and brass finger-rings—votive offerings, no doubt, of village girls who had consulted the oracle and received favorable replies.

Then Germaine felt ashamed of her fears, and half-believing in the legend of the rock, half curious to test its truth, she stooped forward and whispered into the hole, in a clear, distinct tone:

“Germaine!”

A gust of cold wind in her face made her draw back suddenly, and then a deep sonorous voice from the depths of the chasm answered, “Roger!”

CHAPTER IV.

ALL the fun and laughter died out from the girl's face at the sound, for it had nothing mysterious or supernatural about it ; it was perfectly human, a rich masculine voice ; and Germaine, with all her silly fancies, could not mistake the fact that it was a man of flesh and blood who had answered her. She turned to fly, but was only just in time to come face to face with the owner of the voice.

It was by no means a terrible apparition after all ; a very tall, well-built young man in hunting garb, but without a gun, long, light moustaches and sun-burned face. On seeing Germaine he hastily took off his hat, and, bowing respectfully, showed a close-cropped head, and on the forehead a large scar which served to enhance his soldier-like appearance.

He was evidently as much surprised as she was. He had not expected to meet a young woman in riding costume just then, but there was no awkwardness in his manner when he addressed her.

"I beg pardon, mademoiselle, for having frightened you, but I was standing on the other side of the rock when you spoke, and thinking it was some credulous village girl, I could not resist the temptation of mystifying her by answering. But I regret sincerely having alarmed you."

His tone was so frank and courteous that Germaine was reassured, and answered, smiling—

"I was a little frightened, I acknowledge, but as I was so foolish as to try the 'oracle,' I deserved to be made game of."

"Since you know the legend," he replied, "I need not repeat it to you. Only, I trust you will not accuse me of premeditating a little comedy. When I left Bretteville I could not dream that I should meet you here."

She smiled assent, and then asked suddenly—

"Do you live at Bretteville castle?"

"For a short time only," he replied.

"The Duke is a relation of yours?"

"No, indeed, but I was the friend and comrade of his son, who was killed at my side in Tunis."

"Then you are an officer, monsieur?"

"I was made sub-lieutenant three months ago. But allow me to ask," he added, after a moment,

“to what happy chance I owe the pleasure of this unexpected meeting.”

Germaine knew that it was time she explained her being alone in this desolate place.

“I live near here,” she said, at “La Geraldine, and we were out for a ride—my uncle, my sister, and myself—and my horse ran away with me and brought me to the foot of this rock.”

“Great heavens!” he cried, “then you must have come along the side of the ravine, over a road that is fit only for goats to climb; is it possible that your horse did not stumble on the loose stones, and throw you headlong into the gorge?”

“It seems not, for here I am,” she answered laughing, “and Ralph is tied, down there on the heath; I am afraid he is exhausted; he will hardly be able to carry me home. I wish uncle would come.”

“I think he is hardly likely to trust himself on that perilous road, and brave the dangers that you have—”

“In spite of myself,” she interrupted, “it was Ralph, not I, who braved them, you know. But is there any other road?”

“Yes, there is one going in the opposite direction. It is much longer, but much safer than the

one you took. In all probability your uncle will come that way."

"If he knows of the road, which I doubt," she answered, thoughtfully.

"Well, whatever happens, mademoiselle, I beg of you not to attempt to return the way you came, it is risking your life, I assure you. And it will not do for you to wait here much longer, for I see sure signs of a change in the weather; it would not be pleasant to be caught in a storm in this wild region."

"What *am* I to do?" asked Germaine becoming alarmed at his words, and looking at him doubtfully.

His glance partly reassured her, for loyalty and candor seemed written in his eyes, and evidently he understood her doubts of him, for he answered gently:

"You are wrong to distrust me, mademoiselle; I have no wish but to be of service to you; and I would content myself with showing you the right road if I did not think that you would lose your way before you went far. But if you will accept me as a guide I pledge my honor to leave you the moment you desire me to do so."

"I thank you, sir," stammered the girl, a little

moved, and very much perplexed, "but—but—I cannot leave my horse here."

"Certainly not; he will carry you home, but if you take my advice you will keep him to a walk all the way; I will accompany you on foot, and if necessary help you in managing your steed."

They both looked toward Ralph who was snorting impatiently, and pawing the ground as if anxious to be off, and the stranger exclaiming, "I will go and get him," started off before Germaine had time to make an objection.

She remained standing on the enchanted rock, feeling very much embarrassed, and a little bit disturbed at the turn affairs had taken, and thinking that her adventure was ending in a more romantic manner than she had expected.

"But it will not be my fault," she thought, "if I go home with a cavalier in attendance. Uncle Armand has evidently lost all trace of me, and I cannot be expected to stay here all night; it is going to rain, too."

Besides that, this gentleman is the guest of the Duke of Bretteville, so he must be of good birth and breeding. Very likely he is a nobleman; I shall present him to mamma, and Uncle Armand will be very glad of an excuse to call on the Duke

so as to get an invitation to hunt in Bretèche forest. It will turn out delightfully, I am sure."

Her unknown friend appeared at this moment leading Ralph by the bridle and saying—

"I can answer for him that he does not run away again, for fatigue has completely calmed him; he is in excellent condition just now, but to-morrow will want some care."

"Oh, he will not be neglected," cried the girl, "he belongs to my brother, but I love him as much as if he were my own; and now I love him more than ever since—since he has carried me safely through such a dangerous place."

She was covered with confusion at the admission she had nearly made, but got out of the difficulty as best she could, and if her hearer noticed her embarrassment he made no sign of having done so, but remarked thoughtfully:

"Since you are willing to let me direct you, mademoiselle, I think it is safest for you to walk down this slope, and I will lead your horse until we reach more level ground."

As they went slowly down the hill, Germaine said smiling—

"You will think me very inquisitive, perhaps,

but I am anxious to know how you happened to hear my voice—I spoke in a whisper.”

“It is easily explained,” he answered, “that large cleft in the rock is crossed by another at right angles with it, which opens on the *side* of the rock like a speaking-tube, and as I happened to be leaning very near this opening, your name came straight to my ears. I could not see you, of course, and the idea struck me to do as the village lads do when their sweethearts come to Lamon Rock. It is time, though, that I presented myself to you, mademoiselle, in a more serious guise—Roger Pontac, sub-lieutenant of the Ninth Hus-sars,” and he raised his hat as he spoke.

“Roger Pontac,” she repeated; “where have I heard the name before?”

“It is not likely that you have ever heard me spoken of,” he answered; “there is no one about here who would remember me. I told you my name merely as a matter of form, which, by the way, I should have thought of sooner; pray pardon my oversight.”

“Why, you did introduce yourself, even before you had seen me,” cried the girl, laughing, “though you only told me half your name, but

that was all I could expect at Lamon Rock, you know."

"You want to remind me of my offence, Mademoiselle. I had hoped you had forgiven me."

"And I have done so, Monsieur Pontac," she answered; "is not the fact of my taking you as my guide sufficient proof of that?"

"This is the road that leads to La Geraldine," he said, as they left the steep descent and set foot on a good level road at last, "we have no time to lose, for the sky grows blacker every minute; allow me, Mademoiselle Dandria, to help you into your saddle."

Germaine, after a moment's hesitation, put her tiny foot into the young officer's hand and sprang lightly on to Ralph's back. The sagacious beast raised his head suddenly as she touched the saddle, but made no attempt to move till she was ready; it was as if he wished to tell her that he would carry her safely home without a repetition of his previous misconduct.

"I cannot bear the idea of your following Ralph on foot," she said as the young man arranged her stirrup, "he takes such a long step, you will be tired to death."

"Never fear," he answered, "I spent my child-

hood running about the woods of Bretèche, and, though lately I have been accustomed to the cavalry service, I would gladly run ten miles as your escort."

"You were born in this neighborhood," she said, without seeming to notice the compliment, nor the warmth of the tone in which it was uttered, "you belong in Arcy, perhaps?"

"No, I was born on a farm of the Duke de Bretteville's, a farm which my father worked, and at twelve years of age I went to a college, in Paris."

Germaine was silent, for she was filled with astonishment to hear that this man with all the bearing of a gentleman was only a farmer's son. But the discovery did not grieve nor disappoint her, for she knew that her mother would receive him cordially, for he was well educated, and had he not won his epaulettes by his own merit only?

"You see I have no difficulty in keeping up with you," he said, after a pause; "that comes of having early learned to use one's legs. I would prefer, however, to be on horseback and riding at your side."

"I hope we shall often have the pleasure of seeing you at La Geraldine," she said, cordially; "my

mother will never be able to thank you enough for the service you have rendered me."

"Indeed, mademoiselle, it is I who must thank you for having trusted yourself in my care," he replied, evasively; and Germaine, surprised at his evident hesitation, said quickly—

"You will come, will you not?"

"I dare not make any promise," he answered with an air of embarrassment.

"Why not?" she insisted.

"Because—because I am about to leave the country. I am going back to my regiment in Tunis. I am here on a short leave only."

"But you have a few days, at least."

"And I have taken a resolution to call on no one, for it is ten years since I was here before; and if I go about much people will recognize me, and then I shall be blamed if I do not visit everyone. I have relations here whom I do not wish to see, nor to have them know even of my being here. That is the reason I keep myself so close; no one but the Duke knows of my presence in this country."

"But there is no one in La Geraldine who will act the spy——"

"No, but my relations are your nearest neighbors. Fougeray is the next place to yours."

"Fougeray!" cried Germaine, astonished, "that is Madame Vignemal's estate."

"Precisely, and Madame Vignemal is my cousin."

"Oh, dear me!" said the girl in dismay.

"That surprises you, does it not?" he said, "for Madame Vignemal is very rich, and I have nothing but my pay. And it is just for that reason that I do not wish to see her; we quarreled years ago and if I come back to her now she will think that I am watching for her fortune, and I do not choose to expose myself to any such suspicions."

Germaine had it on the tip of her reckless tongue to tell him of the accident which had just befallen his relation, but she stopped herself and thought—

"What a sad recollection he would have of our first meeting, if I were the one to inform him that his cousin had met a violent death, and had moreover disinherited him and left her fortune to her husband! No, I shall say nothing about it; he will hear it soon enough, for it will not take long for the news to reach Bretteville castle."

"It will cost me dear, I assure you," he said in

a voice which proved the sincerity of his words, "to give up all chance of seeing you again; but I shall never forget that I have seen you, and I shall often visit Lamon Rock."

"You will never meet me there," replied Germaine, "I am not likely to be trusted on horseback again for a long time to come. They will wonder when I tell them my adventure why you keep aloof; perhaps my uncle will doubt the truth of what I say."

Roger Pontac started and looked at her earnestly, and Germaine saw that she had hit on the best argument to make him yield; the thought that he might be the cause of her getting into trouble put an end to his hesitation.

"Since you desire it, mademoiselle, I will call at La Geraldine," he said.

"To-day?" she asked, and, as she did not reply, she added earnestly, "if you will come to my mother now, it will be the easiest thing in the world to explain matters. Why not be frank about it? You have done nothing to be ashamed of; quite the contrary, indeed, and your absence will appear very strange, as you have no sufficient reason for——"

"I have a reason," he said, suddenly, and I won-

der very much at your not having discovered it. You know that I am——”

“I know that you are an officer in the army that is fighting the Arabs, and that the Duke de Bretteville receives you as his guest; that is more than sufficient.”

The lieutenant, to her great surprise, made no reply, and neither spoke again until they arrived at the foot of a long ascent.

“When we get to the top of this hill,” he said, slowly, “you will see the trees of La Geraldine, and it will be impossible for you to lose your way, for this road leads straight to your gates.”

“And you are going to leave me?” she cried.

“I must,” he answered, “and you will acknowledge that I am right when you have heard my confession. You ask my reason for wishing to take a final leave of you, and I cannot tell you a falsehood; it is, that Roger Pontac who has no name, no family, no fortune, is not the equal of Mademoiselle Dandria.”

“I do not understand you,” said Germaine.

“If I were once to enter your home I should not have the prudence to refrain from going there again,” he said, “and by seeing you often I would

only be preparing for myself a host of bitterest regrets."

"I understand you less and less," she said, slowly.

"Do you not understand that I am afraid of falling in love?" he asked in a low tone, and the girl, turning suddenly pale, grasped the reins convulsively and told herself that the danger of losing her *way* was not the only one to be considered.

"Do not be afraid," said her companion, before she had decided what course to take, "I have said my say, and have only to ask your pardon for my boldness."

"You did not know," he added in a lighter tone, "that a lieutenant of hussars would take such pains to escape an attack upon his heart did you?"

He spoke gayly, but the expression in his eyes belied his smile, and Germaine, seeing that his gay air was affected for the purpose of reassuring her, said to herself—

"He would love me as I should like to be loved."

After a moment he spoke again.

"I was sure that when you had heard me you

would be ready to bid me go; and now, it is time for me to say farewell."

"And you take back your promise to come to La Geraldine!" she cried; and then added in a tone of frank friendliness, "Come now, Lieutenant Pontac, this is nonsense; pure childishness. Consider; we are not characters in a romance; you have been good enough to show me the way home, when, without your aid, I should have been obliged to pass the night in the open air. Is it not natural that this accidental circumstance should lead to your becoming a visitor at my house while you remain in this country? If you persist in being so unneighborly I shall think that I have inspired you with an antipathy, and your obstinacy will not avail you either, for my uncle will call on you to thank you for your politeness to me, and you will be obliged to return his call. You will be received in a cordial, friendly way and you will go away as free-hearted as you came."

"I will try," said Pontac, sighing; "I would give my life to serve you, so I need not grudge my peace of mind."

"I shall expect you," she answered, "not to-day, for that might look as if you came to get a

reward for bringing back a lost article; but after to-day I shall expect you at any moment."

The lieutenant of hussars bowed low without speaking and turned back, and Germaine continued her way, not once looking round. She was delighted.

CHAPTER V.

ARCY was one of the dullest of provincial towns. Mons. Dandria had made the greatest efforts to rouse the people into something like gayety, but had succeeded only with the younger half of the population; the older people would not stir.

Devoted to their old habits and prejudices the inhabitants of Arcy resented all innovations; they dined at noon, seldom read the newspapers, pretended to look down upon Parisians, and took as much interest in literature and politics as a fish might take in a flower.

Their only pleasure was economy; their one idea of happiness, their one object in life, was to die rich. Consequently, they thought of and talked about nothing but money, and passed a large part of their time in calculating the amount of each other's wealth; and any one who did not pinch and save was looked upon as, almost a criminal, and his speedy ruin predicted. To mortgage property, even for the purpose of buying more, was

considered the depth of viciousness, and running into debt was not a whit better than stealing.

Still, these people had their excuse. They had nothing else in life to do but to slander and to save, for Arcy was a community made up of Annuity-holders who looked upon commerce and manufactures with supreme contempt.

In the principal street, the Rue Nationale, the people walked along slowly and sedately, as if they were counting the paving-stones; they were never in any haste and seldom talked as they went, for they had no ideas to exchange with each other. The shop-keepers stood in their door-ways yawning lazily; the very houses seemed to be tired and sleepy, and if the town-hall clock had stopped going, no one would have noticed the fact—it mattered so little to the people of Arcy what the time of day might be. But when any startling news broke out, any local scandal or other sensational disturbance, the town woke suddenly from its torpor, and was all eagerness to discuss and wonder. The drowning accident at La Geraldine threw the whole town into the liveliest excitement; the people stopped in the streets and shops to talk it over, to argue out the case in all its details, to hint mysteriously that the Vignemals' death was no *accident*

at all, or to calculate the chances of young du Pourméval becoming the heir of his aunt-by-marriage.

The details of the lady's will were very generally known, so Arthur du Pourmèval was watched with eager curiosity whenever he left his house. His first visit was to Doctor Sully, as was quite natural, for the two bodies had been taken out of the river at some distance from La Geraldine and the Doctor had been summoned to examine them.

The Doctor lived in the quietest street of the quiet town. His house was small and his one domestic had formerly been sutler of his regiment. She was a good cook and knew, moreover, how to harness a horse.

At two o'clock in the afternoon the Doctor was seated in his office. It was finished in walnut; the leather-covered arm-chair had, like its owner, seen twenty years of service; the black-marble clock dated from the reign of Louis-Philippe; numberless shelves laden with books, a table, and four cane-seat chairs completed the decoration of this *sanctum*.

It was not a handsome room; no valuable paintings adorned the walls, no expensively-framed engraving of *Hypocrates refusing the presents of*

Artaxerxes: and yet the last would not have been inappropriate, for Doctor Sully's benevolence and disinterestedness were well known.

He never asked a fee from the poor, and as to his wealthy patients he was satisfied with whatever they chose to offer him. As a consequence he was the most generally beloved person in the place, and he enjoyed, besides, the reputation of superior intelligence and good sense, so that his advice and opinion were often asked on matters not concerning the medical profession.

To-day, as was frequently the case, his visitor was not a patient, but in fact the picture of health and spirits, being no other than Mons. Lestrigon, the president of the court of Arcy, the most important personage in the whole town, and a man of unusual discernment and intelligence.

The Doctor and his guest were seated opposite each other, discussing the topic of the day, the accident on the Beuvron.

"So you are quite sure that these people were drowned?" asked the Judge.

"Absolutely," returned the Doctor, "there was not the slightest sign of violence to be seen. It is true that the body of Mme. Vignemal has sustained a few bruises; but, as it had been caught

in the roots of a willow, they are easily accounted for. I made an autopsy of the bodies and am ready to affirm positively that they were alive when they fell into the water; drowning was the cause of the death, and I do not see why the prosecutor should have insisted on such formal proceedings as he did; they were entirely unnecessary."

"He suspects that a crime has been committed," said the other.

"Yes, he told me that he had suspicions of the lad who lives in the woods of Fougeray and La Geraldine, but he makes a mistake. I will answer for Roland Ferrer."

"He is nothing more than a vagabond."

"That is true, but he has many good qualities, and is perfectly straightforward. He was examined and cross-examined on this matter and finally dismissed. Besides, he came to Fougeray of his own accord, when he might easily have made off, and been fifteen miles away before morning."

"That may have been policy on his part."

"But what possible motive could he have had for such a crime?" asked the Doctor, "the Vignemals' death does not benefit him in the least."

"Not directly, but Mme. Vignemal's poor re-

lations may be very materially benefited by it. Proably this Bohemian is acquainted with some of these people who live in this neighborhood."

"And do you suppose that they hired Roland Ferrer to commit the murder? Why, they have no money, and he, moreover, has no use for it; he despises it, and you will admit that he would hardly do such a deed to oblige a friend."

"Well, I do not accuse your protégé, Doctor; I merely want to give every idea due consideration, for the question of suspicion will arise and I shall be called upon to decide it."

"I thought that there was no doubt that Mons. du Pouméval would inherit."

"There is a very grave doubt, for he will have to prove positively that his uncle survived his aunt, since Mons. Vignemal himself inherited only in virtue of his wife's will."

"Oh, dear! poor Arthur!" said the Doctor, sadly.

"His case is not hopeless," said the Judge, "he can get a lawyer to work it up, and that is just where this Roland's veracity will be called in question. For instance, if he states that Mme. Vignemal was still breathing when he drew her on to the bank—"

"But he declared to me that she was not," cried the Doctor, "he described the appearance of the body and I am positive that she was dead. It is more than probable, too, that she died before her husband did."

"How so, Doctor?"

"Because she was much more courageous and energetic than her husband, and most likely made efforts to save herself when precipitated into the river, and by that means caused the water to enter the bronchi, which would produce suffocation in about thirty seconds. Mons. Vignemal on the contrary was half dead with fright when the boat capsized, and would be unconscious, in which state he could live for a half-hour under water. The effect of the fainting would be that the respiratory organs would cease to act for a certain time, during which the want of air would not be fatal."

"I cannot contest these scientific hypotheses, I admit, but how do you know that the husband was paralyzed with fright while the wife preserved her presence of mind?"

"Roland said so; he saw it all."

"Roland certainly played an important part in the tragedy—"

"He behaved very courageously," said Doctor

Sully, warmly, "and it is not his fault that he could not save the unfortunate pair. He was swimming toward them when he saw the husband sitting on the raft completely unnerved, and Mme. Vignemal standing up beginning to undress. Doubtless she intended to try to swim, but the boat capsized at that moment."

"That is what this fellow says, but who knows that he had not himself half severed the rope of the ferry?"

"That supposition is absurd, my friend; for how could he have known that the Vignemals were going to cross that evening?" And besides, he knows nothing of the law and could not foresee the question of succession."

"Certainly not, and perhaps that was the very reason why he pulled out of the river the wife and not the husband. Probably he threw her in again when he found that she was not dead."

"But he would have said that she was not dead; he would have cried it from the house-tops if his motives were such as you accuse him of. Would he not have been too glad to prove that she survived if he were in the employ of her relations?"

"Well, perhaps he thinks that the time to tell what he knows has not yet come."

"The Roland Ferrer that I know is incapable of such policy and craft," said the Doctor, with an air of conviction, "he might kill a man in the heat of passion, but to premeditate a murder is not in his nature."

"My dear Doctor," said the Judge, after a few minutes silence, "I have absolute confidence in your discretion, and I will prove it by telling you what is in my mind at this instant. I hear that there is now in this neighborhood a person who disappeared some years ago—a cousin of Mme. Vignemals."

"Can it be that little Roger?"

"Yes, Roger Pontac, son of a poor fellow who farmed some land belonging to the Duke de Bretteville."

"I know him very well—that lad Roger," said the Doctor; "a remarkably intelligent fellow; I took a great interest in him, and went to visit him several times at St. Louis' College, where he was studying at Mme. Vignemal's expense. I was deeply grieved to hear that he had run away; but his cousin insisted on his following a profession for which he had no taste, and he was not willing to live on charity, so he went off unexpectedly.

and I afterward heard that he had enlisted. That was his true vocation."

And you say he is in Arcy again?"

"No, not in Arcy, but in the neighborhood. The gardener of Fougeray saw him looking at the house, but the young gentleman went away when he found he was observed."

"That is strange," said the Doctor, musingly; "he has nothing to be afraid of here; his cousin was not angry with him, and, though he might not have had a very warm reception, he would not have been shown the door, I am sure."

"I wonder, too, that he has not been to see me; we were such very good friends."

"He is not likely to trouble you, Doctor; rest assured of that. Perhaps he has decamped by this time, but he will be brought back again."

"Then your sage attorney thinks that Roger Pontac has come here expressly to conjure with Roland Ferrer against the life of his rich relation?"

"That is his idea, whatever it may be worth."

"Very little, in my humble opinion, for Roger Pontac has never seen Roland in his life; and, besides that, Roland, though a poacher, a vagabond, an outlaw, so to speak, is not an assassin. For

Roger Pontac I cannot answer so positively, as I have not seen him for ten years; but when I knew him he was upright and manly; impulsive, it is true, but his impulses were always good ones. It is impossible that those two should have conspired together."

"Perhaps you are right, Doctor; but let us drop this painful subject; I broached it for the purpose of learning all I could from you about this Roland."

"Let us talk about Arthur du Pourméval then, the other heir. Do you think he is likely to inherit?"

"I cannot give my opinion on that matter, Doctor; but I will tell you one thing—justice will not be satisfied with the statements of such a doubtful character as Roland Ferrer; he might even affirm that Mme. Vignemal had spoken to him when he drew her out of the water; it would not have much weight."

"I am delighted to hear you say that!" cried the Doctor, "for Arthur himself is satisfied that the fortune is his."

"And he will soon make away with it, I fancy."

"I thought so, too, until he came to me this morning with his plans for the future. His follies will now end, I trust."

"A wedding, perhaps."

"That I am not at liberty to disclose; it is a secret, but will soon be known all over Arcy.

Here the door opened and Jeannette, the ex-sutler, entered with a card for the Doctor.

"A patient; I am going," said Mons. Lestrigon, rising from his chair, while Doctor Sully, glancing at the name on the visiting-card, was astounded on seeing the words *Roger Pontac*.

"Oh there is no hurry," he said, at last, and then, turning to his servant, said:

"Show the gentleman into the parlor, and say I shall see him in a minute;" and he put the card hastily into his pocket, having no desire to show it to his friend, the Judge.

The latter had already buttoned his coat and now took leave of the Doctor, who lost no time in summoning Jeannette to show in the other visitor.

The next minute Roger Pontac entered the office, and Doctor Sully was struck dumb with surprise on seeing him.

The little, thin, pale lad, clad in a suit of clothes a size too small for him, had become a tall, strong, handsome man, attired in a black overcoat of the latest fashion.

"You do not know me, Doctor?" said the newcomer smiling. "Am I then so changed?"

"Yes, lad, changed for the better!" cried the Doctor, admiringly; "you are splendid—what a fortune you must have made! What profession did you choose?"

"Have you not looked at my card?" asked Roger Pontac.

"I only saw your name on it, and that astonished me so—why it is ten years since I saw you last. But I have your card, and since you do not wish to announce your quality," and the Doctor, taking the card from his pocket, exclaimed, as he glanced at it, "Sub-lieutenant of the 9th hus-sars'—is it possible! You are an officer?"

"I was promoted three months ago," replied the young man; "and, as I enlisted in 73, you can see that I have not lost any time."

"Good!" exclaimed the Doctor, his face beaming with delight; "you have won your epaulettes in eight years' time; you, with no influence, no family, no money. Ah, I always knew you would make your mark; give me your hand, Roger Pontac!"

The young officer grasped and shook warmly the two out-stretched hands of his friend, and

then the Doctor led him to the very chair where a minute before had sat the magistrate who had no opinion of Mme. Vignemals poor relations.

"I cannot tell you how glad I am to see you again," exclaimed the Lieutenant, making no attempt to conceal his emotion; "I have never forgotten how you used to visit me at college, where I was so friendless and alone, especially during the long vacation."

"That is all very well, my lad, but why have you given no sign of life all these years? I have only just heard of your return, and indeed I scarcely believed the news."

"I made a vow not to show myself here until I had repaired my faults by rising from the ranks and winning promotion," returned Pontac; "that was my great ambition; I was in Tunis when I received the news, and I did not lose a minute in asking for leave of absence. I did not dream that I should be just in time to hear the news of my cousin's death—and such a death!"

"How did you know of it? Have you been to Fougeray?"

"No, Doctor, I did not dare, though I wanted to see my cousin; she brought me up and I was not ungrateful, but I feared that she would not

receive me. Once I even went as far as the gates, but had not the courage to ring. I had reason to hesitate, too, for the day after I received news of my promotion I had written to my cousin Vignemal explaining my long silence, and begging her to forget the past and to let me see her on my return to France. She took no notice of my letter."

"Good!" said the Doctor, thoughtfully; "that letter may perhaps be found and it will prove—but where are you living, Roger?"

"At Bretteville Castle," he replied.

"With the Duke? How do you happen to be entertained by this grand lord, who looks down upon the people of Arcy?"

"I owe the honor to a very sad circumstance. His son, who was lieutenant of my squadron, was killed at my side when we were charging the enemy, and it was in defending him that I received this sabre-cut. I could not save his life, but I succeeded in rescuing his body from the Arabs, and I brought to his bereaved father his medal of the Legion of Honor."

"That was well done, Roger—very well done, and proves that I was right in calling you a person of good impulses."

"Has any one asserted the contrary?" asked Roger Pontac, smiling.

"No, no, let us talk of something else; I can understand your not wishing to go to Fougeray, but why did you not come to see me?"

"I should have been recognized in Arcy, and my cousin would have had reason to be offended at my coming to you; but there is no fear of that now, since the poor woman is dead. That is why I am here now. I have come to claim your friendship and counsel."

"My friendship you have already, and my advice is awaiting you. But surely it is not about your health that you want to consult me. You do not look it."

"No, I have not spent twenty-four hours in the hospital since I entered the service. I want to ask you how I ought to act under these sad circumstances. Everyone knows that Mme. Vignemal had withdrawn her protection from me."

"But that is no reason why you should not attend her funeral, which will take place to-morrow. You must be there."

"I will, Doctor; and there will be no hypocrisy on my part for I am sincerely grieved at her death."

After a pause, Doctor Sully said :

“ I suppose you know that your cousin left all her money, by will, to her husband.”

“ No, did she?” asked Roger, indifferently.

“ Yes, indeed ; her fortune will probably go to Mons. Vignemal's nephew, Arthur du Pourméval.”

“ What, little Pourméval, who was always dressed to within an inch of his life when the other boys of his age were climbing trees and tearing their clothes? Well, so much the better ; he will probably spend the money on his toilette ; Mons. Vignemal's fortune will be very useful to him.”

“ But it is your cousin's fortune that Pourméval will inherit, and you are the loser by his luck.”

“ I was her heir, then?” asked Roger, simply.

“ Yes, heir to a part of her fortune ; but indeed even a part of it is worth regretting ; she leaves between two and three millions, and there are not more than six or seven of you to inherit.”

“ My word ! I thought she had much nearer relations than I am ; or rather I never troubled myself to discover who were her heirs ; but indeed I do not regret the money ; my pay is quite sufficient for me.”

"At present, yes, but one of these days, when you are a superior officer, you will want to marry the woman of your choice—and what is more, my friend, your relations will not relinquish their claim without a struggle; they will go to law against du Pourméval."

"They will do it without my help, then," said Pontac, quietly.

"Do you mean to say that you will make no effort at all in the matter?"

"Certainly I do. I should look well, should I not, a lieutenant of hussars, running about after lawyers and magistrates! I shall go back to Africa."

"You are just what I thought you would be," said the Doctor, looking at him in deep admiration, "self-reliant, independent. My dear boy, rely on me; I am your friend. I shall always be ready to serve you."

"And I have at this moment a favor to ask of you, my kind friend," said Pontac, smiling.

"What is it; what can I do for you?"

"Give me an introduction to Mons Dandria whose sister-in-law bought La Geraldine ten years ago."

"Nothing could be easier, for I am their med-

ical adviser; but what do you know of Mons. Dandria?"

"I have never seen him in my life, and that is just why I require an introduction. I have a message for him from the Duke."

"From the Duke?"

"Yes, he has heard that Mons. Dandria is very fond of sport; so he wishes to invite him to shoot in Bretâche Forest. He would carry his invitation himself were it not for his being in mourning for his son. He sees no one but myself who can talk to him of poor Henry."

"It is very gracious of the old Duke to think of Mons. Dandria, especially as he does not cultivate the people here at all. It is fortunate you happened in to-day, for I have business at La Geraldine and you can accompany me and be presented to the family."

"You are sure it is convenient to you, Doctor?"

"Oh, perfectly; I told Jeannette to have the carriage ready at three; so if you will wait here a few minutes I will go and change my clothes. Have a cigar while you wait," and the Doctor left the room as he spoke.

Roger Pontac, on being left to his own reflections, first congratulated himself on having found

his old friend unchanged in his affection, and then thought with delight that he should that day see Germaine Dandria. He had not confided to the Doctor that the Duke's message was not the only motive for his desiring an introduction at La Geraldine; but the truth was, that on his return to the Castle the day before the Duke had at once perceived that something had occurred to agitate his guest, and Roger had confided to him his adventure at Lamon Rock.

To his surprise, the Duke, after listening with fatherly interest to the young man's recital, advised him to go at once and call at La Geraldine without troubling himself as to what the consequences might be, and moreover furnished him with a pretext for the visit. Roger was only too glad to follow the advice of his friend, but hesitated as to whether he should speak of his accidental meeting with Miss Dandria, the day before, and at last, deciding to be guided by her own conduct on seeing him, he went to the stable to order a horse, and here he first learned the news of the accident at the ferry.

No one at the castle knew of the young officer's relationship to Mme. Vignemal, and he took care not to enlighten them, and after long considera-

tion determined to go to Doctor Sully for advice as to what course he ought to follow, under the circumstances. On the way it occurred to him to ask the Doctor to introduce him at La Geraldine, and now that his desire was about to be accomplished he felt that a turning-point in his life was reached.

Heaven itself had placed in his pathway a woman whom he would not have dared to approach under more ordinary circumstances, and his heart bounded with delight at the thought that she herself had exacted of him a promise to see her again.

He was walking the floor impatiently when the Doctor returned, dressed in his best, and saying, smilingly, "You can see by my appearance that I am bound on an errand of unusual importance. This is not an ordinary professional or friendly visit."

Pontac looked surprised, and the Doctor went on—

"Yes, I am going on a very delicate mission—in short to ask the hand in marriage of one of Mme. Dandria's daughters."

At this unexpected announcement Roger Pontac turned suddenly pale, while the Doctor added

with a laugh, "not for myself, you know!" and then, seeing for the first time the change in his hearer's face, he cried, "why Roger, you look as if you had heard some bad news! Are you ill?"

"I?" stammered the lieutenant, "no, it is nothing, I assure you; only this room is very warm, I think."

"Yes, indeed; Jeannette likes to make fires fit to roast an ox, as if I were still bivouacking in the mountains of Kabylia; that is it. What interest should you take in the prospects of two young ladies whom you have never seen?"

"Not the slightest; of course, but, Doctor, I am afraid I will be an intruder on this occasion. You will not want a *third* in your matrimonial conversation with Mme. Dandria."

He forced a smile as he spoke, but the Doctor answered quickly:

"No, I shall not ask you to be present at our tête-à-tête, but you can amuse yourself very well without me. There is no formality at La Geraldine, and when you have delivered your message you will be free to do just as you like. Walk around the grounds, and talk to Mons. Dandria and the young ladies. The latter are lively and intelligent, and very pretty."

Roger tried in vain to raise some objection; it was impossible; how could he decline this introduction after having himself requested it? By insisting he might rouse the Doctor's suspicions as to the real cause of the sudden change in his sentiments; and besides that, were there not *two* Miss Dandrias? One of them was to receive an offer of marriage, but *which* he could not say; and, moreover, would she accept?

His meditations were interrupted by the Doctor saying that the carriage was ready, it was time they set out.

CHAPTER VI.

IN a few minutes they were driving through the Rue Nationale, and the passers stared curiously at the new comer. The direction in which they were going showed that the Doctor and his friend were bound for La Geraldine; evidently, then, the stranger was a suitor for the hand of one of the young ladies. The news spread from mouth to mouth, and before very long all Arcy knew it, but no one recognized in the handsome stranger the little Roger Pontac who used to play about the Fougeray woods in blouse and sabots.

"This road must be very familiar to you," said the Doctor, as they neared La Geraldine.

"Yes, I can see the tops of the old trees in the park. I used to play there every day when the place was unoccupied; I could go all over it blind-fold, I believe."

"Mme. Dandria bought it in '71, but she did not come to live here until three or four years afterward, for her daughters' studies kept her in Paris."

"She has two daughters, I think you said."

"Yes, and one son, who is not worth very much, however."

"Are the daughters very near of an age?" asked Roger, hoping to gain some information.

"The elder is twenty-three, about, and the younger twenty and half. You see it is time they married—the elder, at all events."

"And one of them is likely to be, I imagine."

"Oh, you never can tell. They are apt to be particular in their choice, especially Ernestine; and their mother will give them their own way in the matter."

Roger started. *Ernestine* was not the name he had heard through the cleft in Lamon Rock.

"Is Miss Ernestine the—the elder sister?" he asked, timidly, fearing that his curiosity would appear peculiar.

"Yes, she is the elder, and to me the more interesting of the two girls; but they are both charming. Ernestine would make a splendid wife for a man, not that Germaine would not do so too; she has the germ of many excellent qualities, if they were only more developed. No one can say what Love will do for her in that way, but at present she is giddy, thoughtless, and full of romantic

ideas—a mere child—while Ernestine is a lovely woman, and would make a man happy, beyond a doubt.”

“Evidently it is the elder sister who is to receive the offer,” thought Roger, with secret satisfaction.

A few seconds later they entered the gates of La Geraldine, and half-way up the drive met the old servant Baptiste taking a letter to the post. To the Doctor’s inquiries he answered :

“Mons. Dandria is out shooting, sir, but Madame and the young ladies are in the garden. I think they went down Periwinkle Walk.”

“That is all very well,” said the Doctor, as they drove on, “but how the deuce am I to find this Periwinkle Walk?”

“I know where it is,” said Roger; “I have often been there; we must go through that larch-grove—how it has grown since I saw it last!”

The coachman had seen them coming, and was waiting for them at the door of the house. They got out of the carriage and went at once in the direction of the larch-trees. Everything was familiar to Roger Pontac, and brought back the memories of his childhood with startling vividness; but he gave but little thought to the scene

around him, and they had not gone far when they saw Mme. Dandria coming slowly toward them. At her side was one of her daughters, whom Roger Pontac knew at once, in spite of her close blue hood.

“Good afternoon, Madame,” cried the Doctor, going forward to meet them. “Good afternoon, Miss Germaine ; you did not expect to see me so early, did you ? I have come with a message, and my patients must do without me as best they may. Let me present to you my friend Mons. Pontac, officer of hussars, whom I have not seen for a long time. He is a neighbor of yours, for he is visiting the Duke de Bretteville, and he has brought an invitation from him to Mons. Dandria.”

“My brother will feel highly honored, I am sure,” said Mme. Dandria, in great surprise ; and when the visitor had delivered his message Germaine exclaimed, suddenly :

“Uncle will be delighted, sir, I know, for he has thought and dreamed of nothing but the game in Brétèche Forest for a long time ;” and at her words Roger Pontac’s hopes revived suddenly. It was evident that she had not acquainted her mother with her adventure at Lamon Rock, and to Pontac this reticence seemed a favorable omen.

"I beg your pardon, Mme. Dandria," put in the Doctor, "but if you could favor me with a few minutes' private conversation I should esteem it a favor. I have something of importance to communicate."

"Certainly," she responded, wonderingly; and then, looking at Germaine and Pontac who were standing together, she asked her daughter:

"Will not Ernestine soon be here?"

"Oh, yes, she is coming," replied Germaine quickly, "she is down there gathering leaves and periwinkles for her herbarium. I hate herbariums; they are like cemeteries for flowers, to my mind."

Mme. Dandria turned to the Doctor, who was all impatience to deliver his message, and Pontac, delighted at being left alone with Germaine, felt like blessing Ernestine for staying away.

"I knew you would come," said Germaine, as soon as her mother was out of hearing.

"And you will, I trust, forgive me for availing myself of a convenient pretext," said Roger, earnestly.

She smiled gaily and then said:

"I have not told mamma of our adventure; but now that you are here I will explain it to her

directly she is finished with the Doctor. I wonder what he can have so mysterious to say to her?"

"I think I know," said Roger, hesitating; and while he spoke Doctor Sully was transacting his friend's business with great earnestness.

"Yes, he came to me this morning for the express purpose of asking me to carry his request to you. You know he has no relation, and I am his physician and his friend, and he is, I assure you, very impatient to know his fate."

"I should think so," said his listener, quietly; "and, though I feel flattered at his offer, I cannot but think it a little premature. His uncle is not yet buried."

"I agree with you, Madame, but what can we expect? The man is madly in love; he says he would have offered himself a year ago but that his fortune was so very modest. Now that he is rich, the first thing he does is to throw himself at your daughter's feet. His very first thought was of her."

A few yards behind these two another dialogue was taking place.

"And so the Doctor told you that he was coming here on matrimonial business! Did he say whether it concerned my sister or me?"

“No, Miss Germaine, and I dared not ask, for I dreaded hearing that it related to yourself.”

“If it does, it is not settled yet, by any means—but did Doctor Sully tell you the name of the aspirant?”

“Not directly. He said, however, that Mons. du Pourméval called on him this morning.”

“Ah, then it is Ernestine’s affairs, not mine. I am delighted!”

“I hope you are right,” sighed the officer.

“You shall see,” she said laughing, “directly my sister comes up, mamma will take her aside and the Doctor will come and talk to us. Mark what I tell you!”

Just then Mme. Dandria was saying:

“You understand, Doctor, I shall not try to influence my daughter in the least. She shall do exactly as she likes in this matter—”

“Oh, certainly, but you will give her good advice; and let me beg you to give me an answer for Arthur at once. He is in the direst suspense; he cannot eat nor sleep, and I will not answer for the consequences if he meets with a direct refusal.”

“I had no idea he was so intense,” replied Madame, “but of course he must have some an-

swer—directly Ernestine comes I will tell her—”

“Pardon me, but is it necessary to consult Miss Ernestine? This concerns her sister only.”

“*Germaine!* Do you mean to say it is Germaine you have been speaking of? Is it possible that Mons. du Pourméval wants Germaine, not Ernestine?”

“Certainly,” said the Doctor, smiling, “and we have been talking at cross-purposes all this time—”

“But he has openly paid great attention to my elder daughter—”

“That may have been a lover’s ruse, and, Miss Germaine doubtless has so understood it.”

“I will call her at once, and find out what her sentiments are; and meanwhile will you entertain your young friend? Take him to see the magnolias—ah! there is Ernestine.”

Doctor Sully went toward the young people and introduced Pontac to Ernestine, who had just come up with her hands full of periwinkles, and her eyes resting wonderingly on the stranger. At the same time Mme. Dandria drew her younger daughter aside and, pinching her ear, smilingly said in a low tone:

"I have some news for you."

"I know it, mamma, for the Doctor has on kid gloves and his best overcoat. He has brought an offer of marriage."

"Why, you must be gifted with second sight!—He comes from—"

"From Mons. Arthur du Pourméval to ask the hand of Mlle. Ernestine Dandria."

"No, not Ernestine, but you, my child."

"*Me?*" cried the girl, really astonished at her mother's words; "the Doctor must have made a mistake, for Arthur du Pourméval has been in love with my sister for the last three years! The last time he spent the evening here he had no eyes and no waltzes for any one but her."

"We have all, I think, misunderstood his intention, but there is no mistake now; it is you whom he desires to make Mme. du Pourméval."

"But I don't care anything for him; I only like to waltz with him—he is such a good dancer!"

"But you do not dislike him?"

"No, mamma, and I am sure that Ernestine does not, either. He ought to apply to her, not me; sisters should marry in the order of seniority; it is not my turn."

"Nonsense, Germaine, listen to me: Mons. du

Pourméval does not expect you to engage yourself to him at once ; he only asks permission to pay his addresses—to come here often.”

“ He does that already ! And I am sure he has had plenty of opportunity to declare himself to me if he wanted to do so ; he must be very timid.”

“ That would not have been according to etiquette, my dear ; there is a certain rule about such things, and I am sure you would be the very one to feel indignant if a young man proposed to you between the figures of a quadrille. Mons. du Pourméval has only conformed himself to customs in applying first to the mother of the young lady of his choice.”

“ And I suppose the young lady ought to be much affected at being asked, but I am not so in the least. I know he always preferred Ernestine, and I am not going to believe that his affections have suddenly jumped from grave to gay, from brunette to blonde. In short, mamma, I cannot give him any answer just now.”

“ We *must* give him an answer, Germaine,” said her mother, “ for we have no right to leave him in suspense. Are you willing that I should hold out any encouragement ?”

“Encouragement, no ; but he may continue to visit here, exactly as he has always done, if he chooses to do so.”

“You know, Germaine, that this young man is very rich, and as mistress of Fougeray your position would be a very enviable one.”

“I should quite dazzle the good people of Arcy !”

“Will you never be serious ? But I must tell the Doctor what answer he is to take to his friend. Come, let us go back.”

They soon overtook the other three, who were walking along slowly, and Mme. Dandria found occasion to whisper to the Doctor :

“She requires time for reflection, and meanwhile will be pleased to have Mons. du Pourméval visit here as usual.”

“That is as much as he can possibly expect, I am sure,” said the Doctor, eagerly, “and I shall go at once to acquaint him with the happy result of my embassy. “You will not be sorry to be relieved of the presence of this young gentlemen, for you will want to talk with your daughters and your brother-in-law about this important matter.”

“Yes, indeed ; it will be impossible to conceal the matter from Ernestine,” said the mother,

thoughtfully ; and at that moment her elder daughter turned round and addressed the Doctor :

“ Can you tell me why our Arcy friends have forsaken us ? We have not seen one of the young gentlemen for three days.”

“ It is doubtless, my dear Miss Ernestine, because their leading spirit is in deep mourning and goes nowhere ;” and, while he was speaking, Germaine was saying to Roger Pontac :

“ I have altered my mind ; I shall never tell mamma of my meeting you at Lamon Rock.”

“ I know your reason for concealment, and I know, too, that there is nothing left for me to do but *to forget*,” he answered, sadly.

“ You have guessed, then, that Mons. du Pourméval’s message was for me, after all ? But you do not know what my answer was ; I will tell you. I said that I could not decide at present, and meanwhile he is to come here on the same footing as he has always done. I will tell you a secret if you will promise to keep it,” she added, looking at him with a smile.

“ Do you doubt me ?” he asked.

“ No, indeed, and this is the secret : The reason I encouraged Mons. du Pourméval to come here

is, that I want him to marry my sister; I fancy she would not refuse him."

"But it is you he loves, not your sister."

"He thinks so now, but he may change his mind. And now that you know my plans you will come again, will you not? My uncle, when he calls on the Duke, will certainly invite you."

Roger Pontac flushed with delight at her words, and was about to answer when the Doctor turned toward him offering him a seat in his carriage as far as the Bretteville road.

"I hope, sir, that we shall see you again," said Mme. Dandria to the young officer, forgetting in her agitation that she had not asked her visitor into the house.

Every one, excepting perhaps Germaine, was anxious to put an end to the call, for the Doctor was in all haste to carry his news to Arthur du Pourméval; Miss Dandria, suspecting that the Doctor's visit had some connection with herself, longed to have an explanation from her mother, and Roger Pontac asked nothing better than to be alone with his own thoughts; so the leave-takings were not prolonged any more than politeness demanded.

The sub-lieutenant's mind was in a turmoil of

conflicting ideas as he left La Geraldine, for he could not decide whether to hope or to despair. Certainly Germaine's words and manner were more encouraging than he had dared to expect; but, on the other hand, was it at all likely that she would refuse du Pourmèval's millions for the sake of Mme. Vignemal's disinherited cousin?

CHAPTER VII.

Arthur du Pourméval was a young man whose great ambition was to raise himself above his sphere.

His father before him spent half his fortune in trying to shine in Parisian society and to keep up with the country squires of his own province, and the young Arthur, early left an orphan, soon began to display the same characteristics. On reaching his eighteenth year he commenced reducing his capital by assiduously frequenting the theatres of Paris in the winter, and driving four horses through the streets of Arcy-sur-Beuvron in the summer. Having, however, inherited from his mother, Mons. Vignemal's sister, a large stock of prudence and worldly wisdom, he determined that the best thing for him to do was to make an advantageous marriage as soon as an opportunity presented itself, which did not occur until Mme. Dandria began spending the summer at La Geraldine with her children.

The two young ladies were well educated,

pretty, and very pleasing; their mother was reported to possess a handsome fortune, and their uncle, a rich bachelor, was not likely to disinherit them. So Arthur du Pourméval decided that his opportunity had come, and took active measures to improve it, contriving to become acquainted with the family, and to enter their circle of society in Paris. Mons. Dandria became interested in the young man, who, consequently, was soon received as a friend at La Geraldine, and being gifted with both wit and tact it was not long before he had worked his way into the good graces of Mme. Dandria and her daughters. Having accomplished this much he began to reflect, to feel the ground around him, as it were, before going farther. The young ladies were equally beautiful and equally attractive—the younger one rather more sympathetic than her sister, perhaps, but both possessed of excellent qualities. He could not choose between them, and so decided to offer himself to whichever one showed any inclination to respond to his advances, and to take the greatest pains meanwhile not to display a preference for either.

He was sufficiently handsome, with a very prepossessing manner, a good dancer, and a man,

moreover, who knew *how to talk to women*; and with all these advantages it is not surprising that he soon succeeded in his undertaking.

And yet the result of his mode of action did not please him, for it included two unforeseen facts: the elder sister fell deeply in love with him, and he himself lost his heart irretrievably to the younger, who, it was evident, cared nothing for him.

His prudent calculations had turned against him, and he was obliged to own that he was well punished for his disingenuousness. Love is a passion which admits of no compromise, and is sure to resent the indignity of being put on an equality with worldly interest.

Arthur du Pourméval had only two alternatives—to renounce the woman he loved and marry one to whom he was indifferent, or to marry neither; another man, under such circumstances, would have fled from the field in despair, but Du Pourméval had the courage to remain and make an effort to repair his error.

He repressed his real feelings, and continued to pay his court assiduously to the elder sister, without, however, ceasing the most delicate attentions to the other, and Ernestine was completely misled

by his apparent devotion, but Germaine shrewdly guessed that he was playing fast and loose with both her sister and herself. Such was the condition of affairs when the accident at the ferry in the woods made a millionaire of Mons. Vignemal's enterprising nephew, but, to do the young man justice, it did not occur to him that with his improved fortunes he could very reasonably hope to make a much better match than that to which, heretofore, he had aspired.

He sincerely believed himself perfectly free to follow his own inclinations in his choice of the sisters, for though he had *allowed* Ernestine to think that it was to her hand he aspired, still he had never let a word escape him which could possibly be construed into a declaration of love.

And now, since he had become a rich man, he believed that there was no doubt of his suit to Germaine being looked upon with favor; and here his plebeian ancestry showed itself; his mother's lessons were bearing fruit, for she had taught him in his earliest childhood that money is the ruler of the world, and that its possession can accomplish anything. So he had no fear of Mme. Dandria's objecting to her younger daughter being married before the elder one; no mother would refuse so

good a match as he was, and Germaine, though she did not love him *yet*, could not fail to be dazzled and flattered at seeing him with his millions at her feet. Indeed he thought it very generous and chivalrous of him not to turn his back on La Geraldine and return to Paris, where every door would open gladly to receive him ; instead of this he had not lost a moment, on hearing of his good fortune, to commission his friend the Doctor to take his offer to La Geraldine. The answer he received was encouraging, but Doctor Sully also took occasion to repeat to him what the Judge had said concerning the inheritance. This last came like a thunder-clap to Arthur du Pourméval, and in spite of the Doctor's assurances that the fact of Mme. Vignemal's having died first could be proved by scientific means, the young man fell into the deepest despair. At present he was universally looked upon as the fortunate heir, but this could not last long, for the poor relations of Mme. Vignemal were not people to renounce their claims without consulting the law, and the true state of the case would thus be made public.

What was he to do in this dilemma? It was four days since the Doctor had carried his message to Mme. Dandria, and now it was imperative that

he should show himself at La Geraldine, to begin his siege to Germaine's affections, to try and calm Ernestine's just anger, and, above all, to talk money-matters with Mons. and Mme. Dandria. What could he say to them? To lie was repugnant to his nature, especially as it would not be the slightest use in this case. Arthur du Pourméval felt the need of an adviser, but Doctor Sully had been called to Paris on professional business, and there was no time to lose ; so, after a great deal of hesitation, the supposed heir decided to call upon Mons. Lestrignon and get his opinion of the case.

This resolution taken, du Pourméval ordered his coachman to get the coupé and two horses ready, for he knew that in any event politeness demanded that he should present himself at La Geraldine that day. He had decided that in the existing state of affairs honesty was the best policy—in fact the only one, but that, after announcing to Mme. Dandria that there had arisen a serious doubt as to his inheriting a fortune, he would add certain variations calculated to represent himself in rather a romantic light to the eyes of his beloved one.

This he knew would be a great advantage to

him, at least as far as the young lady was concerned.

“When I heard that I was to inherit a large fortune my first thought was to ask the hand of Miss Germaine, which I hesitated to do all the while I was a poor man; but, now that I learn that owing to some legal difficulty I must remain as I have always been, I come to withdraw my offer. Believe me, it costs me dear to renounce my brightest hopes, but it is only just that I should do so.”

This was the little speech he had prepared, and he knew Mme. Dandria and her daughter too well to doubt what their reply would be. They would not be outdone in disinterested generosity, and their doors would still remain open to him, which was all he wanted for the present. Germaine could not fail to be touched by his noble conduct.

He set out on foot to Mons. Lestrigon's house, resolving to choose the most retired streets so as to escape observation if possible, as he did not wish to be stopped and questioned by all his acquaintances, and he believed that the only difficulty would be in crossing the Rue Nationale.

He had not taken more than twenty steps, however, and was just entering a narrow lane between

high garden walls, when he found himself face to face with a man who deliberately barred his way.

Looking up in surprise he recognized one Vaurinet, a pettifogging lawyer, who enjoyed an unenviable reputation in Arcy, and whom Mons. du Pourméval had never honored with a bow. What was his astonishment, then, on seeing the man take off his hat politely, without showing any inclination to stand aside.

"Mons. du Pourméval, I was just going to your house," said Vaurinet, "but it is as well that I met you here ; in fact, better, for your servants, doubtless, would spread the news of our interview all over town."

"Our interview !" repeated Pourméval, in supreme disdain, "on what subject, may I ask ?"

"On the subject that interests you more than all others—the inheritance of Mme. Vignemal. You are probably aware that you cannot inherit her fortune in virtue of Article 722."

"And you wish to advise me, perhaps ?"

"No, I wish merely to assure to you a fortune which you will certainly lose if I do not interfere."

Pourméval smiled ironically, and was going to reply when the other went on quickly :

"I know that I have not the favor of the court,

and I shall be the first to advise you to secure the services of a member of the Parisian bar; but to plead your cause successfully he must be able to produce proofs. He must show, beyond a doubt, that your uncle survived his wife; and you make a great mistake if you think the judge will admit the medical theories of your friend Doctor Sully. The court is always predisposed in favor of natural heirs who have been disinherited, and Mme. Vignemal's cousins are honest, hard-working people, while you—"

"I am an idler, and I have horses, carriages, and lackeys. And may I ask the reason why you have come to assist me to deprive these interesting persons of their rights?"

"I can as easily serve them as you, and that by merely holding my tongue," said Vaurinet.

"That means, I suppose, that you have it in your power to produce proofs which will render void their claims; and you want me to buy these proofs. Why do you not apply to my opponents? They would as willingly purchase your silence."

"I acknowledge that I thought of doing so, for Mme. Vignemal's cousins, though penniless, at present, will soon have plenty, and I could get from them a written promise—"

“Sell your conscience, in fact.”

“No, I am not bound in conscience to enlighten Justice, though I should be culpable if I were to try to mislead it. I do not consider myself bound to interfere in any case not a criminal one. I have a perfect right to tell what I know or to keep silence.”

“And you believe you have a right to sell the secret you profess—or pretend to—”

“There is no pretense; and the moment you agree to pay me a certain sum (we can arrange that between us), to pay me that sum when you have won your case, I will give you information of such facts as will immediately decide the question in your favor. No one will attempt to dispute them.”

“But you would not expect me to make you any promise without knowing something of the nature of your ‘facts,’” said Pourméval.

“Neither can you suppose that I am going to show my hand to you,” retorted the other; “but I will give you some idea of the value of my secret. There are two ways of showing that your uncle inherited his wife’s money, and can therefore transmit it to you. The first means is to

prove that his wife died before he did; and the second to prove that he survived his wife."

"But that is all the same thing, is it not?"

"As to the result, yes; but not as to the fact. One witness will certify for instance, that Mme. Vignemal was dead when she drifted to the bank, three minutes after the accident; and what if another person can prove that Mons. Vignemal was alive fifteen minutes after that? These proofs I can furnish you with, but I shall not say anything more without your written contract. You will run no risk in giving it me, since you will not engage to pay me until you have won your suit.

This interesting dialogue took place in a very retired street, and would have ended long ago, if any one had chanced to pass, for Arthur du Pourméval would not, under any consideration, have been caught talking to such a disreputable character as this Vaurinet.

But as the fellow talked Pourméval gradually became convinced that he was speaking the truth, and that his profession might be worth considering.

"Mr. Vaurinet," he said, without his dropping his distant tone, "you will understand that I cannot reply to you here in the open street. Come

to my house to-morrow night at eleven o'clock. My servants will be in bed, and I myself will let you in."

"Very well, replied the other, coldly, "I shall be punctual—in the meantime, I have the honor to wish you good-day," and he passed on without further delay.

Arthur du Pourmèval continued his way in the other direction, plunged deep in thought. This unexpected rencontre had somewhat changed his views on the subject of Mme. Vignemal's money, for there was still some hope for him, if it could be proved that Mons. Vignemal was alive a quarter of an hour after his wife. The thing was possible, though hardly probable; but, at all events, he would overcome his repugnance for cultivating Mons. Vaurinet and find out what the fellow knew. It would be wise to consult Mons. Lestrigon first, however, and du Pourmèval turned his steps in the direction of the Judge's house, hoping to reach it without further interruption.

CHAPTER VIII.

ON coming to the Rue Nationale, du Pourmévl was agreeably surprised to see that there were but few persons in the street, and no one lounging on the veranda of the club-house, as was generally the case, and he was congratulating himself upon these fortunate circumstances when a voice from above him called his name, and looking up he saw, at a window in the second story of the club-house, no other than Alfred Dandria, who beckoned to him eagerly.

Just at that moment, he would rather have met any one he knew than Germaine's brother, whom he had not seen for several days, as young Dandria had left for Paris a few hours before the accident on the Beuvron, and it was always difficult to induce him to return to La Geraldine.

"What luck!" cried Alfred, from the window. "I was just thinking of going to your house, and here you are! Come upstairs."

"Impossible; I am going to make a call."

"Oh, you can do that afterward—"

"No, I am expected; it is very important business."

"And *I* want to see you on a matter that is very important. Come up, I beg you."

"I prefer not to be seen in the club just now. Can you not come down?"

"Indeed I cannot; my uncle might happen to pass by and catch me; and besides, we cannot talk quietly in the street."

"Nor up there, either; we should be interrupted every five minutes."

"No, on my honor! There is not a soul here but five or six old bucks with their noses in the newspapers. Do come up, old fellow."

"I tell you it would not do—I am in deep mourning."

"Oh, yes; uncle Vignemal has breathed his last. I heard about it. And he has left you a nice pot of money, you lucky dog; I might wait a long time before such a thing happened to me, and I am just the man that needs it most; but I beg you, my dear Pourméval—in the name of your millions—come up here; I have a favor to ask you."

So Arthur du Pourméval, inwardly wishing his friend at the bottom of the sea, but thinking that it would not do to lose an opportunity of making

himself agreeable to the brother of Germaine Dandria, replied:

“If I can oblige you, I shall be only too glad,” and then he slipped quietly into the club-house, going at once to the large, bare hall, which was called, by courtesy, the reading-room. This club-house bore very little resemblance to those of Paris, for it boasted no servants in livery, and the furniture was remarkable only for its plainness. There were fine rooms with panelled walls, a number of cane-seat chairs, a dozen arm-chairs, some card-tables with shabby green-cloths, and one billiard-table bought at second-hand.

And yet this place was the resort of the best people in Arcy, and only the *élite* were admitted; Mons. Vaurinet had been refused entrance.

Arthur du Pourméval was met at the door of the reading-room by Alfred Dandria, who, taking him affectionately by the arm, led him into the billiard-room, which was entirely deserted.

“I did not know you were here,” said Arthur. “When did you come back?”

“To-day, at half-past twelve. Five hours on the railroad, and not a wink of sleep all night! I am hardly able to stand. You have not seen Mme. Dandria yet?”

“No, indeed; I am in no hurry to go to La Geraldine, for I shall have rather a warm welcome when they hear what has happened to me. The only one of the four who won't denounce me will be Germaine. She has sense, and always makes allowances for a fellow.”

“Would it be a great liberty on my part to ask what crime you have committed?” said Pourméval, with a smile.

“Liberty? No indeed, for I called you up here on purpose to tell you all about it. The fact is, Pourméval, I have been playing the fool in a gambling house where I am well-known, and have run in debt for six-hundred dollars. I was obliged to give a note for the amount, but I have not a cent to pay with, and when my uncle hears of it—”

“He will help you out of your difficulty, I am sure,” put in his listener.

“Not he, indeed! You don't know Armand Dandria. All the help he will give me will be to say coolly, ‘My dear boy, you are bound to disgrace yourself sooner or later, and if I pay this debt you will only contract another; so it is much better to let you come to grief at once; it will be cheaper, and may hasten your reform.’”

“I cannot believe that your uncle will be as merciless as you think—”

“He will, for it is a matter of principle with him; he will not budge an inch. My mother is not so inflexible; she would give me the money, I know—but only after a grand *scene*, and a storm of tears and reproaches for which I have no liking. Ah! if Germaine had the money she would not let me ask twice for it; but I know she has only two-hundred and forty dollars in her cabinet; so you see, my dear Pourméval, you are the only one to help me out of this hole.”

Arthur du Pourméval had been expecting this, and was not much pleased at the prospect, for in the present state of his finances it would be very inconvenient for him to lend the desired sum; but, on the other hand, he was unwilling to offend young Dandria, for he did not wish to have an enemy at La Geraldine.

“It is a wretched business,” said Alfred, disconcerted by the other’s hesitation, “and one should never borrow money of a friend, I know. If I were only of age I would apply to a usurer, but I did not think that you would miss eight hundred dollars—I say *eight* hundred, because I do not

want to be without a cent after taking up the note."

"Oh, I will lend you the money very willingly," said Arthur, who had taken his resolution while the other was speaking.

"Thanks, thanks, my dear friend!" cried Alfred, grasping Arthur's hand and shaking it with great effusion. "I knew what a good-hearted fellow you were; I was right to rely on you for help. I need not tell you," he added, eagerly, "what I shall say if they ask my advice—up at La Geraldine; you know what I mean—if you should ever think of becoming my brother-in-law! I have eyes, you see, du Pourméval."

"If you had gone straight to La Geraldine," said Arthur, with dignity, "you would have learned that last Thursday Doctor Sully came from me to Mme. Dandria, to ask her daughter's hand in marriage."

"Is that true? I am delighted, and I know, too, that Ernestine—"

"It was Miss Germaine's hand I asked," interrupted Pourméval.

"You don't mean it! I thought that—but never mind. I hope you were accepted."

"It has not got as far as that yet, but your sister

did me the honor of not refusing me, and I am to be allowed to continue my visits."

"It's settled then—you will be married after Lent. If my sister did not intend to accept you we would have all gone back to Paris, but as it is we shall probably remain here till New Year's. That is a most awful bore, but I am resigned, since you are to marry Germaine. I have to congratulate you on your choice, Pourméval, though she *is* my sister, and as for you—well, I shall not say what my opinion is; you know well enough. And you are a millionaire, too!"

"Not yet."

"Oh, well, it's all the same. Sourdass told me all about it. Mme. Vignemal left everything to your uncle."

"Sourdass has made a mistake; so have many others, myself among the number. If I had known the truth sooner I would not have dared to offer myself to Miss Germaine, and now I greatly fear that your mother will think I wilfully misled her. I have to prove that my uncle survived his wife."

"The deuce! But you will prove it."

"I do not see how I can do so. One person saw them disappear when the boat capsized, and a few

minutes afterward found Mme. Vignemal near the bank. She gave no sign of life, and my uncle's body was found the next day, some distance down the stream. I do not think he could swim, and, in any case, how am I going to find a witness to testify that he *saw* my uncle some time after the accident, and heard him call for help? There may be such a witness in existence; I have a slight hope, but it is a very slight one, I assure you."

"Wait a minute," said Alfred, rubbing his hand across his forehead thoughtfully; "I remember hearing a conversation somewhere; let me see—ah! I have it; I can furnish the witness you want."

"Are you speaking seriously?" said du Pourméval, who never had much faith in young Dandria's assertions.

"Certainly I am; do you think I would joke on such a serious subject? Yes, I mean it. Chance has thrown in my way the means of aiding you, my friend, my future brother."

"But you were away at the time, and never heard of the accident till this morning!"

"That is true; I heard of it here in the clubhouse, and I only wish I had received the news sooner. Now, let me see. The accident took place last Tuesday, did it not?"

“Yes, toward nine o'clock in the evening. Your mother and uncle know the exact time, for they were in their drawing-room when they heard the cry for help.”

“Good. And where were the bodies found—that is, your uncle's body?”

“On the left bank of the river, but a great deal farther down; within gun-shot of the bridge.”

“What had become of the boat?”

“Only a few planks of it were found; it must have dashed against the piles, for the remnants of it were floating about under the first arch.”

“That settles it. Pourméval, the fortune is yours, beyond a doubt.”

“I wish you would explain yourself, Alfred,” said Arthur, impatiently.

“Well, I am going to do so. This is what I heard, no later than this morning, in the railway-train. I was comfortably settled for a nap, as there was no one in the carriage but myself, when in came an individual with a long, pointed chin, a nose the shape of a battle-axe, and gold spectacles. He sat down at the other end of the carriage, and the next minute another fellow joined him—a little, old man, who looked as if he might be a village money-lender. I was furious, and lighted a cigar

in the hope of smoking them out, but they did not budge—”

“Your recital is very amusing,” said Pourméval, suddenly, “but you do not consider that I am on thorns.”

“I am coming to the point in a minute; have patience. The man with the spectacles glared at me ferociously, but I finished my cigar at my leisure, and then tried to sleep. But if those brutes didn’t begin to talk! I had a great mind to commence singing *All the worse for her*, to make them stop. All on a sudden I heard the man with the spectacles ask the other one if he had seen anything in the papers about an accident on the river Beuvron. I was astonished, for I had not noticed anything of the kind; but it seems this man took part in the tragedy. After a great deal of preamble—”

“Which you will spare me,” put in du Pourméval.

“This is what he said—I will imitate his voice for you—‘I own, not far from this town, a small, unpretending country place, to which I come occasionally for a breath of air. My house is situated on the bank of a stream which, though not large, is at times exceedingly turbulent. I had spent a

week in my rural home when I was unexpectedly summoned—last Tuesday evening—to Paris on urgent business, and although the weather was frightful I prepared to set out at once, by the nine forty-five train’—my story begins to interest you, does it not, Pourméval?”

“Go on, I beg of you!” said Arthur.

“Well, this man went on to say that, as he was crossing the bridge in a great hurry to catch his train, he heard a voice calling for help, and looking over the parapet, saw a man clinging to a capsized boat. It was bright moonlight, but the wind was lashing the water into enormous waves, and in another minute the boat was dashed violently against the piles of the bridge, and he saw it no more. He was no swimmer, so he ran as fast as he could to the railway station, and had just time to tell an employé what had happened when his train started, and he was off to Paris. Probably the man he told did not feel inclined to go and search the river, and so paid no attention to the matter; but it is more than likely that he would have been too late to save Mons. Vignemal; and so you see you will inherit, after all.”

Arthur du Pourméval did not make any rejoinder, for he was too much agitated to speak. He

sincerely pitied his unfortunate uncle, whose life it appeared might have been saved, and at the same time he thought he had discovered what Mons. Vaurinet's information was. Probably the pettifogger, secretly on the search for information, had run against the railway employé, and the two had agreed to share the profits of the business, and work together.

"I can do without the gentleman now," thought Arthur, and then asked aloud of his companion.

"You do not know the name of your 'man with gold spectacles'—how are we to find him?"

Oh, that would not be a difficult matter. I should know him a mile off; and we would only have to find his 'rural home where he goes for a breath of air'—he got off the train at the station by the bridge."

"Then I shall go there at once," said du Pourméval, eagerly.

"You need not trouble yourself; it will not be necessary, for the worthy man declared his intention of going to the authorities at Arcy and making a statement of what he had seen and heard. He would have no object in inventing the story, for it does not reflect any credit on himself. He left a fellow-being to perish miserably, rather than

CHAPTER IX.

“My dear du Pourméval let me present to you Mons. Pontac, officer of hussars, our neighbor for a short time. Mons. Pontac, my friend Mons. du Pourméval, whom you will often meet here,” said Uncle Armand.

Mons. Vignemal's nephew had reached La Geraldine in his carriage half an hour before the arrival of Mme. Vignemal's cousin who came on foot, and the rivals met in Mme. Dandria's drawing-room.

It was an unpremeditated meeting and a strange one, but chance is often an arbitrary ruler, disregarding circumstances, anticipating the course of events, and hastening the climax.

Roger Pontac had, after a great deal of hesitation, decided to follow Germaine's advice—which, indeed, seemed almost a command—and return the visit made by Mons. Dandria at Bretteville Castle, although he believed that in so doing he was only laying up sorrow for himself. He had little hope of being preferred before Arthur du

Pourméval, who was so much his superior in wealth, position, and knowledge of the world.

He had, it is true, the advantage of his rival in one respect. He knew that du Pourméval was the acknowledged suitor of Mme. Dandria's younger daughter, while du Pourméval had not the remotest suspicion that this handsome young officer was in love with Germaine, or that the young lady herself had not taken any measures to repel his advances.

Although Arthur du Pourméval and Roger Pontac had often crossed each other's path in their childhood, they had never been companions, for Arthur had had nothing in common with the little ill-clad fellow who had lived on the charity of Mme. Vignemal, while he himself was learning the art of tying his cravat in a boarding-school of the Faubourg Saint Honaré; and ten years had made such changes in Roger Pontac's appearance that there was no sign of recognition in Arthur's face when he was being introduced to his uncle's relative-by-marriage.

On this occasion Arthur was comfortably seated before the fire, and in the midst of the family circle of La Geraldine, when Roger entered the room, and the latter, seeing the faultlessly

risk his own skin or lose his train. I should not be surprised, though, if he went to the mayor, the superintendent of police, and the prosecuting-attorney, for he evidently supposes that the death was the result of a crime."

Du Pourméval's hopes rose gradually. The fortune which had seemed to be slipping from his grasp was to be his own, after all—thanks to a mere chance circumstance; he could with perfect propriety avail himself of the permission he had received to visit daily at La Geraldine. But there was no longer any object in his calling upon Mons. Lestrigon; better to let the witness go and declare spontaneously that Mons. Vignemal had survived his wife.

"My dear Alfred," he said, after a long pause, "I am delighted to hear that I can with certainty offer Miss Germaine a fortune worthy of her acceptance. I intended to go to-day, and, after explaining the situation, ask permission to withdraw my proposal."

"Do nothing of the kind, but come to La Geraldine as if nothing had happened, and I will go with you. I am not afraid, now that you have promised me the eight hundred dollars."

"I have that amount with me," said du Pour-

méval, opening his pocket-book and handing out the money with great effusion.

“Thank you, my dear fellow, you have helped me out of a fearful hobble; I shall not forget your kindness, I assure you. And now, shall we go to my mamma?”

“Yes, my coupé is waiting for me; and perhaps, on the way, we might stop at the railway station.”

“That is a good idea. We could make inquiries for the man with gold spectacles: we might even see him.”

Arthur, in high spirits, took his friend's arm, and they went off together, and those who saw them whispered—

“That is settled, you see. The Vignemals' money will be spent in Paris.”

fashionable attire of his rival, regretted keenly having worn his un-dress uniform, unconscious that the simplicity of his dress only served to exhibit the natural elegance and grace of his figure.

He felt, too, that he was du Pourméval's inferior in conversational powers, for he had not learned the jargon of *society*, and moreover was not accustomed to the company of ladies. Du Pourméval, being quite at home with the Dandria family, and knowing just how to please them, was never at a loss for a subject, and could bestow a graceful compliment by merely recalling some incident or making an allusion to a certain waltz or quadrille, while Pontac possessed none of these pleasant souvenirs except his meeting with Germaine at Lamon Rock, and on this subject he could not speak, as she wished the incident to remain a secret.

Mme. Dandria, without knowing what a service she was doing him, soon came to his rescue by saying :

"I am delighted to see that you did not forget the way to La Geraldine, Mons. Pontac, and I hope that we can rely on you to help us to pass several weeks more in the country agreeably ; I think we shall remain until toward the end of the

year, and by December most of our Arcy friends will have flown off to Paris. Mons. du Pourméval will not abandon us, but he is in mourning. We shall not give any formal entertainment but shall always be glad to see our friends—and to number you among them.”

Pontac made a suitable reply to this amiable speech, and this time did not say that he would soon have to rejoin his regiment, for he thought he read in Germaine’s eyes that she wished him to accept her mother’s hospitality without reserve.

The name of Bretteville produced an impression in favor of the young lieutenant. Du Pourméval had never been invited to the Castle, and knew its owner by sight only. He always made a point, however, of speaking of the Duke in a familiar tone as if they were on terms of intimacy, and he looked with great interest at Pontac, the friend of the nobleman, resolving to avail himself of this new acquaintance to procure an introduction into the aristocratic world.

Alfred Dandria was scarcely less impressed, and remarked to Pontac in a conciliating tone :

“As you belong to the cavalry, sir, you are probably fond of horses. I dote on them, and I

should be glad to show you one I bought at Tattersall's this year—Ralph, by Rob Roy and Gypsy—”

“You need not boast of your Ralph, said Mons. Dandria, “he ran away with Germaine, the other day and might have broken her neck.”

“Good for Ralph! How dare you ride him, Miss, without my permission?” asked Alfred, laughingly, of his sister.

“My two saddle-horses are always at your service, Miss. Germaine,” put in du Pourméval eagerly.

“Thank you,” she replied, “but I shall not trust myself on a blood-horse again; I shall do as Ernestine does—ride one of the mares. All's well that ends well, but I have learned to be timid, by a sad experience.”

Roger Pontac was on hot coals when Alfred first spoke of Ralph, fearing that he should betray himself, but he recovered his self-control while Germaine was speaking, and listened with apparent interest to Mme. Dandria's explanation, which was addressed especially to himself.

“We have had only too much excitement in the past few days, My daughter was run away with by this wretched horse, and we were in a state of

the greatest alarm for more than an hour. Her uncle and sister were looking for her in vain until nearly night-fall, when they came home without her, and she arrived alone, some time after. The night before that, Mons. du Pourméval's aunt and uncle, our neighbors, were drowned in crossing the river at the end of our garden. Of course you heard of the accident."

"Yes, madame, I heard of it from some of Mons. de Bretteville's servants."

"We don't know yet that it was an *accident*," said Armand Dandria, "there was a suspicious character connected with it—that very Bohemian of whose depredations I informed the Duke. He did not seem inclined to avail himself of my warning, however."

"At present, he is apt to be very lenient; he is absorbed in his grief for his son's death," said Roger quietly, and after a pause, Alfred suddenly exclaimed:

"Uncle Armand, will you take me when you go hunting in Bretteville woods?"

"Not I, indeed! you are too ready with your gun. I have no ambition to receive into my body a bullet intended for a buck. I do not speak for my own sake only, for people would say that you

killed me for the purpose of inheriting my money—”

“Oh Armand!” cried his sister-in-law in a shocked tone.

“Alfred understands me,” laughed Armand; “but the fact is, he is not invited—”

Pontac hastened to say, “I am sure that Mons. de Bretteville would be delighted to extend his invitation to all the members of your family. If these ladies would like to join a shooting-party—”

“Oh delightful!” cried Germaine; “what do you think of that, Ernestine?”

“Whatever you do,” said the elder sister, looking up quietly.

“Mons. du Pourméval is not so indifferent, I know,” continued Germaine; “his mourning need not prevent him from using his gun.”

“I have not the pleasure of knowing the Duke de Bretteville,” murmured Arthur, secretly delighted at the prospect; and Roger Pontac, who probably had had no intention of offering hospitality to his rival, saw in Germaine’s eyes another request, and acted accordingly. “She is afraid her mother will not agree to the plan if the son-in-law elect is not included,” he thought, and then he proceeded to assure du Pourméval that he would

confer a favor upon the Duke by joining the party.

"That will be delightful," said Mons. Dandria, when Arthur had accepted with a profusion of thanks; and then, after a pause, he remarked.

"Why can we not have a little music this evening? Are you fond of it, Monsieur Pontac?"

"Very much so, although I do not understand it in the least," said Roger.

"Very likely you know some Arabic airs; my nieces could play your accompaniments if you would favor us with some songs. Come, Ernestine."

Every one was delighted with the proposition excepting the two who were expected to furnish the music. Roger Pontac had no desire to expose himself to the criticism of his rival, and Ernestine had other plans that evening.

"I am nothing of a singer," said Pontac, "and the songs of Africa are not likely to please French ears. They sound almost discordant and very monotonous, fit only to put one to sleep."

"I don't believe it," said Germaine; "wild airs are often charming."

"I must ask to be excused from accompanying you, Mons. Pontac," said Ernestine, "for I should

make a failure of it, not knowing anything of Arabic."

"Then I will play," exclaimed Germaine, going to the piano, "if Mons. Pontac will first give me an idea of the *tempo*."

"And I shall be delighted to have a respite from those symphonies and sonatas that you and Ernestine are so fond of," said Uncle Armand; "if I were married and had daughters, I would forbid them to touch a piano; but to hear an Arabic song, sung by an officer of the army of Africa and accompanied by a Parisian, will be a real treat."

"After that, Mons. Pontac, I am sure you cannot refuse!" said Germaine, laughing, and Roger, seeing that the arrangement would secure him a tête-à-tête which he had been vainly longing for ever since he came into the house, made no further objection.

Mons. Dandria went and sat on a sofa at the end of the room as far as possible from the piano; Alfred contrived to leave the drawing-room unnoticed, for he was anxious to put his eight hundred dollars away in safety, and to ascertain the condition of Ralph's knees; Ernestine, as usual, seemed absorbed in her embroidery, and du Pourméval had the good taste to seat himself at her side and pre-

tend to compliment her upon her needle-work ; he knew that he owed her some consideration, and he did not dream that he had any cause to be jealous of Pontac's tête-à-tête with Germaine. Mme. Dandria sat down near her brother-in-law, for she felt that there should be a mutual explanation between her future son-in-law and her elder daughter, and this was an excellent opportunity. She had not the slightest suspicion of Pontac's sentiments, and so it happened that the six occupants of the room were divided off in groups of two, at such distances from each other that they could converse in low tones without any fear of being overheard.

"This is a very good idea of your Uncle's," said Pontac, as Germaine began running her fingers over the piano keys ; "for if we were going to sing a ballad or an opera-air we would have needed notes, and then we should have to have some one here to turn over the leaves of the music ; but as it is," he added, "we are left to ourselves, and I have an opportunity of telling you—"

"You must tell me between the verses. Now, give me the *time* ; sing the first line," said she suddenly.

"*Ia thir en nouba*," he sang, or rather chanted in slow, melancholy rhythm.

"I have it," she said, striking the chords, "that is lovely, very like Italian. And I always thought Arabic a harsh language! What comes next?"

"*Sîr on sellem alâ el mahbouba*," he continued.

"What is the meaning of that last word?"

"Beloved one," answered Pontac slowly.

"Will you translate the whole line, Monsieur?" she asked, after a pause.

"Sweet bird, go, salute my loved one; that is the burden of the song;" he said.

"Very well; now we will try it together," said Germaine commencing to play again, and Roger began the song. His voice was a good one, and he sang with a great deal of feeling the message carried by the sweet bird to the loved one; and at the end of the first verse Germaine said in a low tone, while she played an interlude:

"It is all arranged, you see. Mons. du Pourméval will inherit, and he will marry my sister. On, yes, I mean it. Don't you see how I managed it all? See them now. He will soon discover that he mistook a mere fancy for real love, and Ernestine is better suited to him than I am, a great deal, for he wants a wife who

will help him to spend his money. I don't care for wealth at all, and in that I think you are like me Monsieur, for you did not move a muscle when you heard my uncle say that your cousin's fortune would go to Mons. du Pourméval.—Now sing the next verse," she added suddenly, beginning the accompaniment again. He did as she said and in a few minutes he went on talking quickly and with great earnestness.

"Doctor Sully told us about you,—even spoke of you by name, the night of the accident, but everyone has forgotten it, and if the Doctor thought it advisable he would have mentioned your relationship to Mme. Vignemal when he brought you here. Let me beg you to imitate his prudence—as a favor to me. Sing, sing!" she exclaimed just as he was going to express his readiness to obey her, "uncle is looking at us!"

Mons. Dandria was indeed looking at them, but his thoughts were elsewhere.

"Du Pourméval has a great deal to say to Ernestine this evening," he was remarking to his sister-in-law.

"And I am very glad to see it," answered Mme. Dandria, "for I fear she has misunderstood his attentions to herself; they were certainly

very marked at one time, and it is only just that he should make some explanation."

"No explanation can mend a broken heart," said Uncle Armand, "but let us hope that Ernestine is not so deeply affected." He spoke half in jest, and at the same moment Ernestine was saying to du Pourméval—

"And so you deny that your newly-acquired wealth has been the cause of the change in your sentiments?"

"I assure you that I deeply regret not having made my intentions more clear; since I find you have mistaken my real sentiments," he stammered.

"But your repentance, even if it were sincere, would not avail now," she answered, "I understand the miserable comedy you have been acting all this time; before you became rich you had little hope of winning my sister's hand, and would have taken mine as a last resource. I forgive you, but I pray heaven that Germaine will not accept you, for I love her and would not have her deceived as I have been. She will certainly refuse you when she knows what you are, and then your perfidy will have its reward."

Arthur du Pourméval was startled by this decla-

ration of war, but he could not reply to it, for the song was finished, and a sudden silence followed; then Germaine rose from the piano, and her mother and uncle came forward to thank Lieutenant Pontac for the pleasure he had given them.

“That is beautiful music,” said Mons. Dandria who had heard very little of the Arabic song, “infinitely preferable to Mozart and Beethoven. I like the songs, too, of those ‘red skins,’ the American Indians—”

“And of Bohemians too, perhaps!” said Germaine; “shall we send for Roland Ferrer to sing to you?”

“No, the farther he keeps from La Geraldine, the better I shall like it. He will end in a prison, that fellow; he is strongly suspected of drowning our neighbors, the Vignemals, instead of trying to save them as he pretends. It seems that he is in the pay of a cousin of Mme. Vignemal, a young man who left the country some years ago and returned only lately.”

Roger Pontac guessed at once that he was the cousin who was suspected, for none of the other relations of Mme. Vignemal had left the place. The idea was absurd, and forgetting Germaine’s request, he would probably have declared his

own identity before everyone if she had not interposed, exclaiming:

“What a ridiculous story! The magistrates are trying to get up a romance. I never knew they had so much imagination!”

“Mons. Lestrignon is not given to romancing,” said Uncle Armand, “and it was he who gave me the information. Mme. Vignemal brought up her cousin, clothed and educated him, out of charity, but he repaid her kindness by running away from school, and leaving the country, and no one has ever heard of him since.”

“It seems to me that the doctor told us about that,” said Mme. Dandria thoughtfully.

“He did, but I have forgotten the name of the cousin; he has been seen about here lately—”

“And this mysterious cousin and Roland Ferrer are accomplices, are they?” said Germaine; “then why don’t they catch the Bohemian and question him? He is always round here, and I am sure that if Ernestine wanted him to paint his portrait, or anything, it would not be hard to capture him.”

“They do not wish to take him until they have found the other one, for whom they are now in search.”

Roger Pontac listened with a frown to Mons. Dandria's assertions, and could with difficulty refrain from crying out.

"I am that cousin—you are talking sheer nonsense," but a glance from Germaine kept him silent, and then an unexpected ally joined in the discussion. Arthur du Pourméval knew that the institution of a criminal suit would have the effect of delaying the settling of the estates, and it might even give rise to a question as to the validity of his witness's testimony; he had therefore no wish to have any one arrested.

"I think it a very unlikely tale, although I do not know this cousin," he said, slowly; "if he had any evil designs, he would hardly have confided them to Roland Ferrer; Doctor Sully says that the young fellow is incapable of committing a crime."

"The Doctor is prejudiced in his favor," answered Mons. Dandria; "but we have talked long enough about this odious affair; let us change the subject. Mons. Pontac I will not impose upon good nature by asking you to sing again, but perhaps you will tell us something about the African hunts. Have you ever killed a lion?"

"No, I confess to having very little taste for

that sort of thing—I have not touched a gun since I came to Bretteville. I should be delighted, however, to make my *début* in your company, so if the ladies will fix the day for our grand battue in Brétêche forest I will give the necessary orders at once.”

“Oh, that should be as the Duke says,” put in Arthur, not wanting Pontac to forget that he, too, was to be of the party. “Mons. de Bretteville has given me carte-blanche to arrange the matter, but he begs that the ladies will excuse him from taking part in the affair,” said Pontac, “he is wrapped up in his grief; and I have left him alone too long; it is time that I returned to Bretteville.”

“Oh, will you not stay to dinner?” asked Uncle Armand.

“Thank you, but I must ask you to excuse me, Mons. de Bretteville is waiting for me, and if we are to have the shooting party this week, there are a great many preparations to make.

“How would the day after to-morrow do?” said Mons. Dandria.

“Oh yes, that will be lovely!” cried Germaine, clapping her hands; Ernestine and du Pourméval agreed and Mme. Dandria raised no objections,

though only half pleased with the plan, and then Roger Pontac took his leave, after declining, with many thanks the use of Arthur's carriage.

It was decided that the rendezvous should be at the border of the Forest, at the foot of Lamon Rock, to which place the guests were to go in carriages, by the same road which Roger and Germaine had taken on a certain memorable occasion.

CHAPTER X.

BRETTEVILLE Castle was not at a great distance from La Geraldine, and Roger Pontac set out on foot, taking the path which ran through the garden and along the river-bank to the gate. On the way, therefore, he passed the place where the ferry used to be, and the idea struck him to go down to the edge of the water and examine the spot where the accident had occurred. He found there a piece of rope dangling from the post, and on taking it up he discovered that it was so rotten by long exposure to the weather that it was impossible for it to have borne such a strain as that occasioned by a heavy boat, dragged along by a violent current of water.

“Of course it was an accident!” he said to himself, “this rope has probably seen twenty years of service, and it was not that poor vagabond’s fault that it snapped in two. To think that I, too, should be suspected! And that Mons. Dandria should repeat such ridiculous tales! It is remarkable that no one has discovered that I am

at the Duke de Bretteville's, but I shall not wait to be sent for; I shall go to Doctor Sully directly he returns from Paris, and ask him to go with me to this Lestrigon who has furnished Mons. Dandria with such valuable information. The thing shall be cleared up at once—as far as I am concerned. He gave one more look at the river, and at the top of the Vignemal's house, which was visible above the tree-tops, then returned to the pathway on the terrace, passed out of the gate of the park, and took the road to Bretteville absorbed in thought.

The day had been a most eventful one to him, for he had come face to face with Arthur du Pourméval, the man who was to deprive him not only of a fortune to which he was the natural heir, but also, apparently, of the hand of Germaine Dandria. He had seen and spoken to his successful rival, and he felt that the contest between the poor sub-lieutenant and the elegant millionaire was not an equal one. And yet, although Germaine had not said that she loved him, it was certain that she cared nothing for du Pourméval since she wished her sister to marry him. Roger Pontac did not altogether despair, and yet he hardly dared to hope; but of one thing he was

convinced: it was useless for him to struggle against fate; he loved, and he was ready to sacrifice everything—military glory, hope of advancement, his whole career as a soldier—to his love; for it seemed that he had only begun to *live* at the moment when the echoes of Lamon Rock had whispered in his ear the word *Germaine*.

He walked along quickly, seeing and hearing nothing, paying no heed to the lovely vistas which opened to him at every turn in the road, nor to the river Beuvron which was flowing placidly, until suddenly a dark figure loomed up before him, making a grotesque silhouette in the grey twilight.

Roger Pontac was no coward, but he had learned in Africa that a man should instantly put himself on the defensive when he meets a stranger on a lonely road; and putting his hand into his pocket, he drew out a small revolver, and then advanced toward the apparition, which, as he came nearer, proved to be a tall youth, clad in a suit made of rabbit's skins and drenched with water from head to foot as if he had just come out of the Beuvron. This strange-looking individual was looking at Pontac earnestly, but did not offer to come a step nearer; it seemed as if he did

not wish to leave the river, which was evidently his line of retreat; his attitude had nothing hostile about it, but was more that of curiosity. Roger guessed at once that this was the poacher of whom the Dandrias had been speaking, the person who was supposed to be the accomplice of Mme. Vignemal's cousin. It was a good opportunity to have some conversation with the fellow, so he went up to him saying:

"Good evening, Roland."

"You know me?" asked the other, astonished.

"No, I do not, but they say that you know me."

"I have never seen you until a few minutes ago—when you were looking at the broken rope over there I was just opposite you, on the other side of the Beuvron."

"Then you have crossed the river, but where is the bridge?"

"Nowhere, I swam."

"You must be soaked through! Are you not afraid—"

"I am not afraid of anything."

"Not even the Law, it seems."

"You mean the keepers? I laugh at them, they cannot catch me."

"But the police can, and you will find yourself in jail some day."

"Why, I have not murdered any one, nor stolen anything."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Taking a few hares from the forest and fish from the river is not stealing."

"Ask Mons. Dandria what he thinks of you."

"Have you just come from La Geraldine?"

"You know I have. You saw me on the grounds."

"Is this the first time you have been there?"

"No, the second."

"You are not from Arcy, I think."

"You are very inquisitive, my friend, but I will answer your questions if you will promise to answer mine. I am not from Arcy, but I know a great many people there—Doctor Sully is one."

"Doctor Sully! Has he spoken to you about me!"

"Yes, and he has a very good opinion of you, but every one does not agree with him. Mons. Dandria believes that you helped the Vignemal's to their death."

"He knows better than that; he was there when I tried to save them."

"The public prosecutor was not though, and it is he that accuses you."

"I dare say. He questioned me the other day at Fougeray, and would have arrested me then if he had dared, but he could find nothing against me."

"Do you know the heirs of Mons. and Mme. Vignemal?"

"The *heirs*?"

"Yes, the persons who will have their money and property."

"I heard that the husband had a nephew, and the wife some cousins, but I have never troubled myself about them."

"You do not know a man named *Pontac*!"

"No, I never heard of him."

"Nor, *du Pourméval* either?"

"Oh yes, I have often seen that one. For the last six months he has come to La Geraldine nearly every day."

"You seem to mount guard over Mme. Dandria's property."

"I see every one who comes or goes there."

"You did not see me."

"I have just swam across the river so as to look at you."

"Well, now that you have looked at me, what do you think of me?"

"I think that if you are the Doctor's friend, you must be a good man."

"Mons. du Pourméval is his friend, too."

"Oh, I hate *him!*"

"Why, what has he done to you, Roland?"

"Nothing; he does not even know of my existence, but I don't like him."

"Then you will be sorry to hear that by his uncle's death, he becomes the master of Fougerey?"

"That is nothing to me."

"He will be the Dandrias' neighbor then, and very likely will marry one of the young ladies."

"Which one?" asked the Bohemian, eagerly.

"Ask him the next time you see him," said Roger, smiling, "he knows more about it than I do. I am not in the family secrets."

"You do not come as a suitor?" asked Roland, with some hesitation.

"Oh, I have no inheritance, and no one would have a poor devil who possesses nothing but his military rank."

"You are a soldier then?"

"Yes, a cavalry-officer; and I enlisted as a pri-

vate—you ought to do likewise, it would be the best thing for you.”

“Yes, I thought of it once, but, I don’t want to.”

“Why not? You were made to sit a horse, you are just the figure for it, and you are strong, brave, and accustomed to hardships. The life of a *Chasseur d’Afrique* would suit you to a nicety.”

“Pretty soon, perhaps, but not now. I would rather be what I am.”

“A marauder, a vagabond! You will repent your choice before long, for the life you lead is sure to end badly, and that sooner than you think, perhaps. You are watched and you will be taken. Believe me, Roland, you have no time to lose. Come to me to-morrow at Bretteville Castle and I will give you a letter to the officer in command of my regiment at Castres, and the money for the journey. In six months you will be sent to my squadron; you will see new lands, and you will use your gun; and the next year you will enter a brigade. The police will not catch you then.”

“You live at Bretteville; are you the Duke’s son?”

“No, I am no relation to him, but I am visiting him at present. I shall expect you to-morrow,

and if you like you can go and ask Dr. Sully's advice."

Roger was interested in this young fellow, and sincerely wished to set him in the right path, and, as Roland hesitated to reply, he said authoritatively:

"Well, that is settled; you will come to me;" and the next minute they both heard footsteps approaching, and, looking round, saw a figure which seemed to have come from behind a large rock, moving slowly and noiselessly toward them.

Roland instantly plunged into the river and began swimming vigorously across, and Roger Pontac, astonished, turned toward the new-comer, who proved to be a peasant carrying a staff and wearing a broad-brimmed hat.

Before Roger had time to speak, the stranger addressed him in a familiar tone.

"So it *is* you, my lad! I thought I knew your voice."

"Be off with you!" said Pontac, thinking the man was intoxicated; "you have made a mistake."

"No I haven't, my dear. I went to Bretteville Castle and the servants said you had gone to make a visit at La Geraldine. That is why I came here.

I thought I should find you, and I was right. You have changed a good deal since you left home."

"Who are you?" asked Pontac coldly.

"Pierre Lemale, your cousin, Roger. Don't you know me? When your father was living I kept an inn down near the bridge, and you have had more than one glass of cider there, when you were a little chap."

As he was speaking, Roger Pontac gradually recalled to his mind this cousin of his, and remembered that his father had had a very bad opinion of the fellow, and had even forbidden him to set foot on the Pontac farm.

"Well?" he said, in a tone that was not at all cousinly, "what do you want?"

"How haughty you are, Roger!" cried the man; "you speak to me as if I were a beggar. But I am not that yet, thank Heaven!" My inn did not do well, for I gave credit to some rascals who cheated me, and I had to sell out, and for the last twenty years I have been going round the country with a pack on my back. But I have not asked charity of any one."

"Then what do you want of me?"

"What a question to ask! You know that our cousin Vignemal is dead, and that we must put in

our claim to the property. I was at Laval when I saw the news in a paper, and I came here at once. I'll wager that I know more than you do about this business of ours."

"*Ours!*" repeated Roger, disdainfully; "you need not suppose that I have anything in common with *you*."

"Well, that's a good joke!" cried Lemale; "do you mean to say that we are not related in the same degree to the defunct Vignemal? Have we not the same interest in her fortune? *One-sixth* is what we will each have, for, unfortunately, there are four more of us—the two Langlois girls, little Lemerlieu, of Courtil, and the lad Reuben, who has the Chanterie farm at Saint Meichel. We are all the children of *her* first cousins, and I have been to all the rest about this business. You were the only one missing."

"How did you know where to find me?"

"The gardener of Fougeray said he had seen you round there, and I had already seen your name in the newspaper account of the battle where the Duke's son was killed. So I thought you would likely be at the castle, and to the castle I went as fast as I could."

"You might have spared yourself the trouble,

for I tell you once and for all I shall have nothing to do with this matter. You and the other four are free to do as you like about it."

"You don't mean to say—why, Roger, think of it! The old woman left at least three millions! You would have—"

"If she had left *ten millions* it would make no difference to me."

"You must be rich already, then."

"I am not rich, and it is for that reason that I do not mean to involve myself in this business."

"Well, for all that, you ought to help us poor people; you are a gentleman; you could talk with the judges."

"It would be useless. Mons. Arthur du Pourméval will inherit the whole fortune. My advice to you is, to relinquish your claims; the lawyers will only take your money and you will gain nothing."

"I know a lawyer who will take the case for nothing; that is, he will not ask pay unless we win."

"He does not know as much about the case as I do, then; and, in any event, you need not count on me for assistance; remember that. Good after-

noon," and Pontac turned his back suddenly and continued his way.

The ex-innkeeper, though, ran after him, determined not to be put off so unceremoniously; but he evidently thought it wise to drop the tone of impudent familiarity which thus far he had used.

"I hope I have not offended you, cousin," he began, walking at Roger's side; "I know I have been too familiar. It is different now from what it used to be; you are a cavalry-officer and I am only a poor peddler, and the rest are not much better. We ought to be respectful to you; and you need not be afraid that I shall go round boasting that you are my cousin. I did not tell them so at the Castle, and I shall not go back there with you, but shall leave you when we get to the *Grand-champs* road, which is only a few steps from here. Meanwhile, we can talk a bit, can't we?"

"As you like," answered Roger, dryly, "but I warn you that I shall not alter my mind."

"Oh, I am not going to ask you to do that. But I can tell you something that will surprise you; they say that the husband was living when the boat was swamped down at the bridge. That may all be, but at the very same moment the wife was alive too!"

"How do you know?"

"I know who does know. Some one who is no stranger to you."

"To me!"

"You were speaking to him a few minutes ago, and it looked as if he did not want to be seen with you, for he leaped into the river the moment I showed myself."

"You must have good eyes, to recognize a person by this light."

"Oh, no one would mistake Roland Ferrer; he does not look like any one else, and no other man would swim across the Beuvron to save himself a walk. He was on the spot the other night when the rope of the ferry broke; I suppose he has told you about it."

"He has not told me anything at all about it; I never saw him before in my life."

"Well, that's queer! You were talking together as if you were old friends, and you told him to come to you at the Castle."

"It seems that you took upon yourself to listen to what we said."

"No, no, I only wanted to make sure that it was you before I spoke. The moment I heard your voice I came out, and it is a great pity that

Roland Ferres ran away ; I should have liked to speak to him, for I know very well that he could help us if he chose ; he saw the whole affair."

"If he takes my advice he will leave the country and go into the army."

"He must not go before he has given testimony in our case ! The lawyer says that everything depends on his confessing."

"Confessing what ? Does this lawyer, too, suspect him of drowning the Vignemals ! It is absurd."

"He did not say that he suspected him ; but look you, cousin, Roland Ferrer has a very bad name about here, and he owed the Vignemals a grudge for setting their people to catch him."

"He would not murder them for that ! But there is a still more improbable story afloat. They pretend that *I paid* Roland Ferrer to assassinate my cousin Vignemal !"

"Who got up such a tale as that ?"

"A magistrate, it seems, but I shall go to him and put an end to these rumors—"

"No one but the gardener of Fougeray has recognized you, and I am the only one who knows where you live."

"They are looking for me, I hear."

“But they will not find you—unless I speak.”

“Oh, you can speak; I am not in hiding, I will go and tell them who I am, and that I do not want a dollar of my cousin’s money; I am quite willing to renounce my share of the inheritance, *formally*, in writing if they like.”

“Well, that would leave more for those who do *not* renounce their share; but you would do better to join us, cousin. Of course, I am not going to tell any one that I saw you talking to Roland Ferrer toward nightfall, on a lonely road close to the spot where the Vignemals came to their death. Here is the Grand-champs road; I am going one way and you the other; but think over what I have said. Good-bye, cousin, till we meet again!”

Saying which, the fellow turned abruptly to the right and disappeared in the falling shadows, and Roger Pontac made no attempt to call him back, but quickened his steps in the opposite direction. His conversation with Lemale, which at first was only tiresome, had ended by being seriously annoying, for the man’s hints and innuendoes made him repulsive to the frank young officer, who knew that his plebeian relation must have some purpose in coming to intercept him.

“He wanted to *sound* me,” thought Roger, and I am certain that he was listening behind that rock; probably he has been watching me for some time past; and who knows—perhaps it was he who originated the idea of Roland Ferrer’s having drowned Mme. Vignemal at my instigation! It might be an effectual means of having me excluded from the succession; and if he can really prove that Mme. Vignemal survived her husband he and the other four will have the fortune. His last words sounded like a warning—almost a threat. It was as if he said: “If you will join us I shall be silent, but if not I shall tell how and where I surprised you and Ferrer talking earnestly together, as if met by appointment.” And, indeed, I should be troubled to prove that my meeting with that strange youth was purely accidental. I do not see why the deuce he should swim across the Beuvron for the pleasure of looking at me; I ought to have asked him what he did it for, and why he thinks necessary to inspect all the gentlemen visitors of La Geraldine. He asked me if I came as a suitor, and he said that he hated du Pourméval. Ah, I have it! He is in love with one of the young ladies. I believe the fellow is quite capable of such a thing!”

Pontac's thoughts soon reverted to his own affairs again, for the vagaries of a poacher were comparatively of small importance. After a long silence he said aloud. "It is my own fault; I ought to have gone about and shown myself, and told everyone that I was Mme. Vignemal's cousin, instead of staying hidden at Bretteville as if I were ashamed to be seen. Doctor Sully made a mistake and gave me bad advice, but I will see Mons. Lestrigon and put an end to all this mystery and misunderstanding. I would go to-morrow if I were not obliged to make the arrangements for the shooting-party, and the next day I shall have an opportunity of asking Mons. Armand Dandria to introduce me to the magistrate. Miss Germaine wants me to preserve my *incognito* for the present, but she does not know how the matter stands. When I tell her she will approve of my decision."

He was right there, but he did not know that Ernestine was about to take a *role* in the drama of which he himself was the hero.

CHAPTER XI.

THE dinners at La Geraldine were always very gay, the table abundantly supplied and well attended, and the cooking excellent; what was still more important, the Dandrias had good appetites and sound digestions. Conversation never languished, even when the family dined alone; Mme. Dandria gave no *grand* dinners with invitations two weeks in advance, as was the custom with the people of Arcy. Her guests dropped in whenever they felt inclined, and they were always made welcome.

On the day that Arthur du Pourméval and Roger Pontac met at La Geraldine the former stayed to dine, as he felt that the fact of his being in mourning need not prevent his sitting down to a social meal with such intimate friends. During dinner the shooting-expedition formed the chief topic of conversation, and every one was loud in praise of the Duke de Bretteville's courteous behavior. Arthur du Pourméval was all devotion to Germaine, but she received his attentions in

such a way that he could not tell whether they pleased her or whether she was secretly laughing at his complimentary speeches; and so, being somewhat ill at ease, he took his leave much earlier than usual.

Mons. Dandria and Alfred went to the front door to see him into his carriage, and Mme. Dandria left the room for a minute to give an order to a servant. No sooner was her mother out of hearing than Germaine turned to Ernestine and said in a low tone :

“It seems to me that you have been colder to the splendid Arthur this evening than usual; but you are right; that is the best way to treat a man sometimes, even if you hapen to love him—”

Ernestine interrupted with a gesture of impatience, but Germaine went on smilingly.

“As for me I don’t like him at all. Perhaps you don’t believe that. What would you say if I were to tell you that I love—*another* ?”

Just at that moment Mme. Dandria and her brother reappeared; Alfred had gone to bed, wishing to make up for the previous night spent in playing baccarat.

“Our young friend is certainly a very fine fellow,” said Mons. Dandria.

"Which one?" asked Germaine, mischievously.

"Arthur, of course." The lieutenant is all very well, but he is only a bird of passage, while du Pourméval is master of Fougeray, and our neighbor."

"Not yet, uncle. Did you not say that it depended upon Roland Ferrer? If he were to say that Mme. Vignemal was alive when he saw her on the bank, Mons. du Pourméval's inheritance would end in smoke, would it not?"

"It is not likely that the Bohemian would be believed, even if he were to be *paid* to contradict his first statement."

"So be it!" said Germaine, yawning, "let us go to bed;" and the rest agreed, although it was not yet ten o'clock.

All the family slept on the second story, except Alfred, whose room was on the ground floor, as he liked to be near the front door, so that he could go out at night, jump on Ralph's back, and ride to the club at Arcy, to indulge in a game of cards whenever the desire seized him; Mme Dandria's bed-room was situated between Ernestine's and Germaine's, while Uncle Armand's was at the other end of the hall.

This story of the house was arranged like a

barracks; a long corridor ran from one side to the other with several doors opening into it, and at one end was a small back stair-case; the ladies' rooms looked out on the garden; Mons. Dandria's on the yard.

Ernestine had no sooner entered her room than she locked and bolted the door, and then, exclaiming suddenly—

“Now I can weep in peace!” she threw herself into an arm-chair and burst into tears.

She had forced herself to control her feelings, and to conceal her mental suffering until now, for she did not want any one to pity her, and her mother and uncle had no idea that du Pourméval's desertion had affected her more seriously than to wound her pride; Germaine had not been so deceived, but she had her own plans, and in the meanwhile thought it best not to probe a wound which she believed herself capable of curing; Ernestine, therefore, was obliged to nurse her grief in silence.

Dissimulation and coquetry, weapons to which a more worldly woman would have had recourse, were such strangers to Ernestine's nature, that she would rather have died of a broken heart than to attempt to win back the man who had deceived

her, or to try to make him believe that his change of sentiments was a matter of indifference to her. When she first heard of his offering himself to Germaine she could hardly believe her senses, but pride coming to her reserve she had responded to her mother's questioning glance by saying Mons. du Pourméval was perfectly free to marry whom he pleased. It seemed to her that there must be some mistake; perhaps Arthur du Pourméval had been offended or misled by her reserved manner, and she waited with feverish anxiety to see him again and to hear his explanation.

The opportunity presented itself when Germaine and Roger Pontac were at the piano and the rest of the family out of hearing, but while the lieutenant was singing in Arabic the message carried by the "sweet bird to the loved one," Ernestine was gradually realizing that her life was wrecked.

Du Pourméval's awkward protestations and excuses dispelled her last illusion, and she saw him as he was—a fickle lovelace who changed his loves when his fortunes altered, and who did not scruple to feign a passion which he was incapable of feeling. It did not take Ernestine very long to comprehend his interested motives, his mean cal-

culations and sordid ambition, and she saw that he was not worthy of her affection; she despised herself for having loved him.

“No, I do *not* love him,” she said, drying her eyes, “I hate him, and I shall be revenged on him. He shall not deceive Germaine too. She has just told me that she cares nothing for him, and Germaine would not tell an untruth; but yet she receives him; she encourages him to come here can it be that she is in earnest, that she really expects to bring him back to me? If so, she is very foolish; she could refuse him, herself, but with all his audacity he would not dare to come to me again. And yet, it is more than likely that he will succeed in convincing her that he has loved her all along, in spite of appearances; for why should she be less credulous than I was?”

What was it she gave me to understand a few minutes ago? That she is already engaged to some one else? That can not be possible, for she makes fun of every young man that visits here. It could not be that officer who sang to her accompaniment, for she has only seen him twice, and they have not exchanged ten words. She must have said that merely to reassure me; there is nothing at all to prevent her from falling into

the snare of that traitor, for everyone, excepting me, is urging her on. Mamma, uncle, Alfred, all three, approve of Arthur du Pourméval, and they will give her no rest until she accepts him. God is my witness that if I thought she loved him I would sacrifice everything, even my revenge, and forgive Arthur du Pourméval the injury he has done me; but I know that he would make her wretched; he would forsake her as he has forsaken me. That shall not be, for I will prevent it!" she said, solemnly, getting up from her chair and pacing the floor.

A wood fire was burning on the hearth, and the soft glimmering of a small night-lamp lighted up the white marble chimney-piece and the grey hangings of the room. On the floor at the foot of the bed lay a large Danish dog, of a breed that was almost extinct; he was a great pet, and was allowed to sleep in Ernestine's and Germaine's rooms alternately.

To-night it was the elder sister's turn to have him, but her thoughts were so preoccupied that she took no notice of his caresses, and the dog, discouraged at last, went and lay down at a short distance from her, but kept his eyes on her face, and so followed her every movement.

Ernestine was walking slowly up and down the room—that room in which she had spent so many happy hours. Less expansive than her sister, she had always had a great love for solitude, and often passed the whole day alone in this quiet nook before her easel. From the window she could see over the tall trees of the park to the clear waters of the Beuvron; then the woods of Fougeray, and beyond all, a long ridge of blue hills, against the horizon. She was not romantic like Germaine, having no desire for adventures in the woods, and the meeting at Lamon Rock would not have made any special impression on her; she was more meditative and reserved by nature, and it was not until she had studied the character of Arthur du Pourméval, that she made any response to his advances. Then, little by little, she had come to love him, although she was by no means blind to his faults. She saw plainly that he lacked energy and force, and that if left to himself he would probably be ruined by his love of spending, as his father had been before him; but all this she forgave because she thought him upright and sincere, and she thought, too, that it was her mission to perfect his character.

He had always represented himself tired of

pleasure-seeking and anxious to settle down to a different sort of life, and Ernestine had believed him and resolved to marry no one else. She was only waiting for his formal declaration, to engage herself to him, and to open her heart to her mother in whom thus far, she had not confided.

One hour, however, had sufficed to wake her from her happy dream, to overthrow her castle-in-the-air, and the only thing she thought of now was to punish the one who had so cruelly misled her.

“Yes,” she murmured, “he shall expiate his treason. Germaine shall refuse him; he shall see that his money cannot buy all he wants. And this wealth, this inheritance—he does not deserve to have it.”

She went to the window and looked out toward the river.

“It was there that the poacher saw Mme. Vignemal on the bank,” she continued; “was she really dead? What if he were to swear that she was not? Uncle Armand said that Roland Ferrer’s testimony was the only thing Arthur du Pourméval need fear. And Roland Ferrer will speak if I wish it! He said he would do anything I commanded; that I had only to show a light in

my window—" She seized the lamp and stood it on the window-sill without giving herself time to reflect on what she was doing. Just then the huge dog got up and put his cold nose against her hand, and looked into her face lovingly, as if to say, "I will protect you against everything; speak to me;" and this simple action recalled Ernestine to her senses, and showed her the seriousness of the step she was contemplating.

To go alone, at night, into the park to meet Roland Ferrer, a desperate fellow who had had the audacity to love her and to tell her so! It would be madness. Germaine even, with all her giddiness, would not be guilty of such a compromising action.

"Besides," she said to herself, "I should only waste my time going down to the river; for it is not in the least likely that Roland Ferrer will be there; how should he know that I want to see him? He does not spend all his time looking at my window. I must give up the idea of interfering between Arthur du Pourméval and his fortune."

With a sigh she was turning away from the window, but suddenly caught sight of a small light in the bushes at the end of the garden. It was a

mere speck in the darkness but seemed to move up and down like a signal.

“He is there!” she cried excitedly; “he has seen my lamp. Then it is true that he watches my window, as he said. He has kept his promise; he has come the moment I signed for him; and shall I reward his devotion by making him think that I am mocking him? I cannot do it, and besides I *dare* not, for what would be the result? In all probability he would come and call me, or perhaps climb up to the window here. What would Uncle think? If he were to catch sight of Roland Ferrer near the house he would not hesitate to shoot him dead on the spot. I shall have to go; Belt, you will be my protector, will you not?” she said, putting her hand on the dog’s head. She turned down the lamp; then wrapped a large cloak about her, and, as she did so, said, hurriedly, trying to reassure herself:

“I have nothing to fear from Roland Ferrer, for was I not at his mercy when Germaine’s horse ran away, and Uncle was far behind us? And he only held my bridle and said that he would be my slave; that I had but to tell him what I wished him to do; that he awaited my orders; besides, the river is not so far off; my voice could be heard

at the house if I called, and I shall have Belt; there is no possible danger."

The wild beating of her heart seemed to contradict her words; for, in spite of her confident tone, she realized fully the rashness of the step she was taking, and at the same time she knew that there was more risk in not going.

"Come, Belt!" she said, opening the door of the room cautiously.

The dog jumped up and followed her, walking as quietly as if he knew that she did not want to rouse any one; there was a matting on the floor of the hall; the walls were very thick; not a sound was to be heard in the house. Ernestine carried a small lantern in her hand, and by the aid of its light she went straight to the back stair-case, at the bottom of which was a door opening into the garden.

In another minute she was outside.

CHAPTER XII.

THE little light in the bushes was not to be seen, but Ernestine felt sure that she would find Roland Ferrer "on the terrace at the end of the hedge," the spot which he himself had indicated to her.

She was not frightened, now that she had gone thus far, for she felt complete confidence in Roland, though if any one had asked her on what she founded her trust she would have had some difficulty in explaining. It was an intuition. She crossed the garden and went up to the top of the terrace, Belt walking in front of her; but they had hardly taken ten steps when the dog raised his head suddenly, sniffed the air for a moment, then darted off with the speed of an arrow, and disappeared in the darkness.

"He knows him," she thought to herself, "that is fortunate, for Belt might have barked on seeing a stranger. I had not thought of that."

It now occurred to her, however, that she could not now rely on the dog for protection, as he had evidently gone over to the enemy; but the next

minute he reappeared, and began gambolling round her joyfully, then rushing off again, and returning to repeat the operation. He was saying as plainly as dog could say :

“I have found a friend ; you will see him in a minute.”

Ernestine stopped to look about her and to listen. There was nothing to disturb the stillness of the night except the west wind rustling in the tamarisk-hedges ; she looked toward the house ; every window was darkened ; the whole place was wrapped in sleep.

Then she felt how *alone* she was, and that she had no one but herself to lean on ; but she did not lose her courage or self-reliance, and, advancing bravely to the end of the hedge, saw first her dog, then Roland Ferrer. The poacher was standing with his back resting against the trunk of an oak-tree, but on seeing her he came forward hastily.

“I have come here, because I know that I can trust to you,” she began in a slightly trembling voice, and he, hardly less moved than she, replied :

“I thank you for that ; I hardly dared hope that you would remember me ; and, now that I see you have not forgotten that I long to serve you, I am sufficiently repaid beforehand for anything

you may ask of me. The people round here shun me, but you are not afraid to come to speak to me—”

“Let me explain why I have such confidence in you,” she said hastily. “Dr. Sully spoke so well of you that I should have sent for you to come to the house if it had not been for the way you addressed me in the Tertre woods the other day.”

“I know it was madness—forgive me, I beg of you!”

“I forgive you, because I know you see your folly; if I had not felt sure of that I would not have come here to-night.” And, after a pause, she said: “I see now that I was right in not believing those who spoke ill of you, for Belt would not have let you come here if you were a robber. He seems to know you.”

“He comes to see me every evening, and we have dinner together in my hut on the other side of the river.”

“Do you live near here?” she asked.

“Yes, just opposite your window, and I can see it through the bushes. I know exactly when you light your lamp, and when you put it out every night.”

"That is how you were able to answer my signal so quickly, then ; you have a lantern, have you not?"

"No, it is a torch that I made myself. The pines of Fougeray furnished me with resin ; you see I am not much better than my reputation ; I help myself to other peoples' property."

"Which you will have to cease doing if you want to see me again," she said ; "but it is time I told you why I am here. I want you to give me some information."

Roland Ferrer made a gesture of disappointment and Ernestine told herself that she need not have dreaded this interview, for there was nothing alarming about the young outlaw ; she had judged him aright the first time he had spoken to her.

"You witnessed the accident at the ferry, I believe," she continued.

"Yes," he replied, looking up quickly ; "I was there when the rope broke."

"And you threw yourself into the water to save our unfortunate neighbors ? And you drew the body of Mme. Vignemal on to the bank, but the water washed it back again?"

"Yes, it washed it back again," he repeated slowly.

"I want to know whether everything happened exactly as you told my uncle and the doctor."

"Do you think that I lied?"

"I think that you may have had some reason for not telling the *whole* truth."

Roland started, and then looked at her fixedly.

"Of course I have no right to question you," she said, smiling, "and you are free to answer me or not, as you choose."

"I have sworn to obey you. Ask what you like; I shall conceal nothing from you," he replied.

"Well, I have an idea that Mme. Vignema lwas still living when you last saw her on the bank. You said that you did not know whether she were dead or not, but afterward declared that she was."

"A magistrate questioned me at Fougeray," said Roland, evidently troubled by her words.

"Yes, but you are speaking now, not to a magistrate but—a sincere *friend*. Was Mme. Vignema alive or not?"

"She was."

"You are sure of that?"

"Yes, sure—now."

"*Now?* Did you doubt it at first!

"I did not doubt it, but I had no proof. I have one now."

"Can you show your proof?"

"To you, yes. I can prove that she came to herself while I was gone to your house for help!"

"How could you know what happened while you were absent?"

"If I tell you, you will believe me?"

"Certainly. Why should you tell a falsehood about it, when you need tell nothing if you choose to be silent?"

"I should not tell anything to any one but you; I have said that I would give you my life, and when you have heard me you will look at me with horror—and that will kill me."

Ernestine turned pale as he spoke, for she saw that the suspicions entertained of him were correct—he had committed a fearful crime. And this crime he was about to confess to her! In seeking for an ally against Arthur du Pourméval she had encountered a murderer! Her first thought was to cut short the interview.

"No, no, do not tell me!" she cried; "you have said too much already."

"Too much, and not enough," he replied, as

eagerly ;" if I stop now you will think me a murderer. You must hear me through and judge me afterward."

Ernestine breathed freely again, and began to hope that he was not as guilty as she had thought. At all events she could not refuse to hear his explanation.

"Go on," she murmured.

"I did not actually kill them," he continued, "but I did not prevent their death when I might have done so. I was hidden by the bushes when they passed, and I knew that the rope of the ferry was rotten and not strong enough to resist the current. I had known it for a month past, and if any one but the Vignemals had been going to use it I should have warned them ; but these two people I hated."

"Because they forbade you to poach in their woods. And for that you let them drown!"

"No, believe me, it was not that."

"What then?"

"I thought that they were going to your house. I believed—"

"What?"

"That they were going to ask you in marriage for their nephew."

This unexpected answer struck Ernestine dumb for a moment. The fearful death of these two people was owing, then, to the insane passion with which she had unconsciously inspired Roland Ferrer! She herself was, though indirectly, the cause of the accident on the river!

"You know their nephew, then?" she stammered.

"I saw him come to your house every day, and I heard people say that you would be his wife. I would have killed him rather than have him marry you, so I let the Vignemals go to their death. That was a crime, you will say."

"A crime? No, not in the eyes of the law, but it is a deed for which your conscience will always reproach you."

"I repented of it directly, and leaped into the river to save them. Your uncle saw me a little while afterward; I was dripping wet, shivering with cold, and nearly exhausted by the struggle with the current; I had been in the water for twenty minutes. I could have saved them if the boat had not capsized; you know all about it. Your uncle must have told you what I told him, and I spoke the truth."

“Not *all* the truth, for you gave them to understand that Mme. Vignemal was dead.”

“I did that because I was afraid they would suspect me of foul play; and, indeed, my conscience was not altogether clear—”

“Do you mean to say that you pushed her back into the river?” cried Ernestine, horror-stricken.

“I am not a murderer,” he answered, quietly; “no I tried my best to bring her to, after extricating her feet from the roots of the willow-tree down there, just below us. I laid her down, and listened for her heart; it was still beating. Her right hand was tightly clenched and held some small object which I tried to remove, but could not. I threw water in her face, she did not move a muscle; I did not know what else to do for her, so I called for help, but no one came. Then I tried to lift her up, but she was very heavy and I was so exhausted by my efforts in the water that I could not raise her. I ought to have stayed there till some one came—but I was afraid; it seemed to me that she was going to stand up and curse me,—I was tempted to throw her back into the river, but I took the middle course; I left her where she was and went up to the house to get help.”

“And when you got back the river had washed her out again.”

“The river could not do it for I left her lying more than two yards from the brink. When I found that she was gone I thought the devil had taken her off bodily; and not knowing what explanation to make to the gentlemen I told them the story that you have heard. It was not until the next day that I knew what had really happened to her in my absence.”

“The next day!” said Ernestine in astonishment, “can it be that you are telling me the truth?”

“I swear that I am saying only what is true,” he answered. “When I left your house that night I came down here, and at break of day examined the place where I had left the lady. The print of her body was plainly marked in the damp earth, and I saw at once what had happened. She had come to herself after I left, had crept on her knees to the foot of the terrace, and had tried to climb up. There were the marks of her hands, but her feet must have slipped—for a branch of tamarisk was broken from the hedge where she caught at it to save herself. The bank, you know, is very steep; she lost her balance, fell backward,

and sank into the water. That time it was all over with her."

Ernestine shuddered and there was a pause; then she looked up suddenly:

"But this is mere supposition; you did not *see* it," she said.

"There were the foot-prints in the earth, and the newly broken branch of tamarisk," he answered. "I am just as sure of it as if I had been there."

"The marks would not have proved anything," she said, incredulously; "and they are probably effaced by this time."

"Would you like a proof of the truth of what I have told you?" he asked.

"I would indeed, if one exists."

"Would you believe me if I were to show you the thing that Mme. Vignemal held in her hand at the moment that the boat capsized?"

"Can you do so?"

"I can. It was a flat leather case, which she must have carried in her bosom; for when she was on the drifting boat I saw her beginning to unfasten the body of her dress. When she was thrown onto the bank she held this case tightly in her hand, and she dropped it when she was try-

ing to climb up to the edge. I picked it up at the foot of the terrace the next morning."

"And you kept it?" asked Ernestine.

"Yes, but I have not opened it; it is locked. No one will accuse me of stealing it. I put it away in a safe place, but if you want to see it you shall have it to-morrow."

After a long silence Ernestine answered slowly:

"No, I do not want to see it. I only want to know that you can prove what you have told me; the truth must be made known here at La Geraldine, at Fougeray, at Arcy, and you are the only one to tell it. I cannot do it, because I was not a witness of the accident."

"And you will not be willing to tell that you came here to ask me about it," he added sadly; "so I will speak out. Who must I go to—your uncle, or the Doctor?"

"To Mons. Lestrigon, the president of the court," she answered.

"I will do whatever you say, although it is the sacrifice of my liberty you demand," he said, in a low tone; "of my liberty, perhaps my life."

"What do you mean?" cried Ernestine.

"I mean that the president of the court will send me to the prosecuting-attorney who will put

me in prison, for he already suspects me of having drowned Mme. Vignemal; every one will suspect me, for appearances are against me. I can prove that the lady was alive when I drew her on to the bank; I can show them the leather case that she was grasping, but I have no means of proving that I did not rob her of it and then throw her into the river. They will not believe my story, for they will say that I ought to have told it before. No lawyer will be able to clear me—my indictment will be my condemnation, and then I shall have nothing to do but to die.”

Ernestine knew that he was not exaggerating; that he would be quite capable of taking his own life if shut up in prison for several years or even months. Wild-birds can not live in cages. She reproached herself bitterly at the thought that she had nearly made a victim of this poor fellow, who in his devotion to her was ready to do her bidding without complaining, without hesitating, without even asking why he was to sacrifice himself and what was to be his reward! She would rather a thousand times that Arthur du Pourméval should inherit the fortune, than that Roland Ferrer should suffer for his fidelity to her.

“No, you shall not do it,” she said, suddenly;

“you shall not tell anything at all. When I asked you to go to the magistrates I did not dream that you would be running any risk; and now that I have heard your story I am convinced that you could do no good by speaking, for they would not believe you; it would be utterly useless and you would be sacrificed for nothing. I will not have it.”

“You do not abhor me, then, for what I have done?” he asked, eagerly.

“I pity you,” she answered, and then after a moment she went on: “If you had not led such a wild, irregular life, no one would have thought of suspecting you of a crime, and your testimony would have been believed. You would then have been able to do me a service.”

“I care nothing for the risk, mademoiselle; I would not have spoken of it, only that when once I am in prison I shall never see you again; this is my last opportunity of telling you that I would gladly die to serve you, and my last thought will be of you. To-morrow I will do your bidding.”

“Whatever it may be?” she asked, hurriedly.

“Yes, I shall go to Arcy—”

“You will do nothing of the kind. If you want to please me, you will leave this country at once.”

“You would drive me away from you?”

“It is for your own good; you will certainly come to grief if you continue as you are. Besides, although I do not repent of having trusted you so completely as to come here to-night, I shall never do it again. You will not see me nor be of any use to me, for I shall not speak again to a poacher. You must be a soldier!”

“You want me to sell myself,” he said.

“No, I do not. I want you to enlist in the army of Africa. You can repair your past by fighting for France, and some day you will come back an officer. There will be no necessity then for hiding in the woods to look at our house, but the door of La Geraldine will open to you and we shall be proud to receive you—just as at present we receive a neighbor of ours who had no more influence and wealth than you have when he joined the army.”

“The young gentleman who lives at the Castle, you mean.”

“Yes, how do you know that?”

“I saw him to-day on the road by the river as he was coming from your place, and he spoke to me.”

“What could he have to say to *you*?”

“He said what you have just said; that I ought to stop being a poacher, and enter his squadron, and he told me that if I would go to see him at the Castle he would send me to where the fighting is.”

“And what did you say to that?”

“I said that I was too fond of my liberty to take his advice.”

“But you will take mine, I know. Besides, I do not advise, but command you to go, and you have promised to obey me.”

“Yes, I will obey you.”

“Without delay, remember. Go to Mons. Pontac to-morrow; he will do as he said for you, and in a few years you will come back a lieutenant, as he has done.”

“No I shall not come back at all; I could not bear to see you—married.”

“I shall never marry!” she said, quickly.

“I thought Mons. du Pourméval came for that! He is here every day, and he is a rich, handsome gentleman.”

“Not rich yet, but he will be so, for the Vignemals’ money will be his after all.”

“Has there been any doubt of his getting it?”

“Yes, for he will be required to prove that

Mons. Vignemal survived his wife, and that might have been difficult to do."

"It will be so, for it is not the case. I saw Mme. Vignemal alive half an hour after the accident happened, and it must have been at least fifteen minutes more before she fell into the river again!"

"That may be, but you can not tell it without compromising yourself, and so I wish you to leave things as they are."

"Then that man will inherit! But if I speak there will be a law-suit between him and the cousins of Mme. Vignemal."

"He would lose it, but that would be only just," she murmured.

"You would like him to lose it?"

"I must say that I am more interested in his cousins, who are hard-working peasants."

"And he would only waste the money if he got it."

"I can not say what use he would make of his fortune. Probably he would marry—and any mother would like to have him for a son-in-law."

"Yes, and any daughter would like to have him for a husband," said Roland, between his clenched teeth

"Perhaps she might be obliged to like him," answered Ernestine, speaking half to herself, "but never mind Mons. du Pourméval; remember your promise. You will go to Lieutenant Pontac to-morrow, I shall see him the next day, for we are going out shooting in Brétâche forest, and I shall ask him if he has seen you."

"Who is going with you?"

"My mother, my uncle, my sister, and my brother. Why?"

"I wondered whether Mons. du Pourmèval would be there."

"He is invited and has accepted, but what is that to you?"

"Oh, nothing; I was only thinking that if I go to-morrow and tell the magistrates what happened on the bank of the Beuvron the young gentleman will not have much heart for pleasuring, and perhaps, too, he will not marry any one."

"Probably not, for they say he is insolvent; but you will have to pay dearly for the pleasure of ruining him, and I shall not thank you for it."

"Why are you here then? Why did you tell me, a moment ago, to confess everything?"

"I had a fancy to put you to the test, and besides, the poor relations of Mme. Vignemal inter-

ested me ; but since I have found that you would be ruined by testifying in their behalf I have given up the idea entirely. I care nothing more about the matter, one way or the other. I am glad I came here, though, because I have obtained a promise from you which I know you will keep. Mons. du Pourméval will become the master of Fougeray, but you need not grudge him his good fortune—your future will be a more enviable one than his.”

Roland started but did not speak, not wishing to repeat a promise which he had decided not to keep since he had learned that Arthur du Pourméval's fate was in his hands.

“I must go back,” said Ernestine ; “if you want to ever see me again, you must forget this meeting. *I* shall remember it, and whatever becomes of us both, I shall always be—your friend,” and with the last word she hesitated a little, then gave Roland her hand, which he raised to his lips as deferentially as Arthur du Pourméval himself would have done in the drawing-room of La Geraldine. He did not speak again, but turned away quickly as she left him, and Ernestine, as she hurried across the garden, congratulated herself upon the result of her escapade.

“Good has come out of evil this time,” she whispered. “I thought to ruin one man, and I have saved another. Roland Ferrer will reform and Arthur du Pourméval will have the fortune ; I alone will be wretched.”

She did not know what was passing through Roland Ferrer’s mind at that moment.

“I know how it is!” he thought, shaking his fist at his absent enemy ; “her mother is trying to force her to marry that man because he is to have the Vignemals’ money.

She herself detests him, but will submit rather than let me risk being convicted. But I will save her from this du Pourméval ; I will go to prison, to the gallows, to the guillotine if need be ; what does it matter ?

Mme. Dandria cares nothing for Roland Ferrer ; she will never be mine, but she will not be *his*, either—because he will not inherit !”

CHAPTER XIII.

MONS. VAURINET believed that at last he had lighted upon a wind-fall, for he was in a fair way to realize, at a single stroke, a sum of money which would be sufficient to establish the poor Arcy lawyer in Paris, and put him on the high road, not to fame, but to fortune.

That was his ambition ; to go to Paris, and open an office for the practice of his peculiar profession in all its branches ; for in the slow, one-horse town where fate had placed him there was but little opportunity for him to exercise his talents. Law-suits were very rare, and his clients were generally country clowns who insisted on reduced fees, and disputed the payments even when the cases were won. In short, Vaurinet felt that he was only vegetating ; he longed for a wider field of action, and was confident of success if only he could raise the funds necessary for the entering stakes, and this "Vignemal affair" seemed very likely to furnish the golden opportunity.

By a lucky chance he had been the first to hear what had happened at the bridge, for he was ac-

quainted with the railway-employé to whom the traveller, Mons. Grandminard, had spoken, and this man had come to his friend Vaurinet and imparted the important information of Mons. Vignemal having been seen on the drifting boat. The two worthies saw that the matter was worth following up, for there was money in it, providing that Grandminard's recital was not made public, and it was not likely that the gentleman would return to his country-seat in the depth of winter. Possibly even he would never speak of the matter again, for he had no reason to be vain of the part he had played in it; he would, perhaps, be satisfied with having informed a railway employé of what had happened.

However, Vaurinet lost no time in intercepting Arthur du Pourméval, and making an appointment with him for the evening following; but on the very next day he heard, to his deep disgust, that Mons. Grandminard had come back to Arcy.

There was then no chance of making anything out of Arthur du Pourméval, but Mons. Vaurinet, although he saw that his hopes were again shattered, as they had often been before, did not despair, but made haste to seek out the relations of Mme. Vignemal, and offer them his assistance.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon when he received the news of Mons. Grandminard's arrival in town, and at five he was in the hamlet of Grand-champ, in close conversation with Pierre Lemale, who was the representative of Mme. Vignemal's heirs.

Lemale was just the man Vaurinet needed, for the lawyer's first object was to open communications with Roland Ferrer, who would be more easily persuaded to confide in a peasant than in a gentleman, and the former was accordingly directed to go into the woods of La Geraldine and Fougeray, seek out the young poacher, and, if possible, draw him into conversation.

"Do your best to make him talk about the accident," said Vaurinet, "and meet me to-morrow at noon in the park. Everyone will be at dinner then, so we shall not be disturbed; and if you have discovered anything of importance we will go at once to the prosecuting attorney."

Meinim Park was the less frequented of the two promenades of Arcy. It had formerly been the garden of a convent, which, after the revolution, had been turned into a court-house; and as the pathways were very dark and gloomy and the ground damp, there were never any children

playing there, and few persons passed through the place except those engaged in law-business.

Mons. Vaurinet arrived at the rendezvous five minutes before the appointed time, and as the last stroke of *twelve* was sounding Pierre Lemale, in a fine new blouse, appeared also.

"I could not put my finger on that rascal Roland Ferrer," he began; "but for all that I have news for you."

"I don't care anything about your news if you have not found the poacher," said Vaurinet, sharply.

"I saw him, but I could not speak to him!"

"You saw him and you could not speak to him!" repeated the lawyer; "what do you mean by that?"

"Have patience, sir; I will tell you what I mean. You say that the prosecuting attorney suspects Roland Ferrer and my cousin Roger of plotting to kill Mme. Vignemal. Well, I have spotted Roger Pontac; he lives at Bretteville Castle."

"What! with the Duke?"

"Yes, indeed; the boy has become an officer, and he knew the Duke's son in Africa. That is why the old man has taken him up. He is a big

fellow now, I tell you ; when I asked to see him the Duke's servants stared at me from head to foot before they answered my question."

" Did you say you were his cousin ?"

" Not I, indeed ; I wanted to try and speak to him, first of all, and I knew he would not thank me for claiming kinship with him. The young gentleman was out calling—at La Geraldine, I (suppose he has his eye on one of the young ladies); so I waited on the road for him, and pretty soon I spied him near the river talking to—who do you think ?"

" The young lady ?"

" Roland Ferrer !"

" Do you mean it ?" cried Vaurinet.

" Talking to Roland Ferrer, after nightfall, on a quiet road close to the river," repeated Lemale, solemnly. " Suspicious, isn't it ?"

" The devil—it is ! Did you hear what they were saying ?"

" Only the last few words. Pontac told the poacher to come to him at the castle to-day."

" And did Roland say he would go ?"

" No, for I was stupid enough to show myself at that moment, and the rascallion jumped into the river and began swimming across."

“Better and better—for us. Did you go and speak to your cousin then?”

“Yes, but he treated me as if I was a dog. I did not let him shake me off, though, and we walked half-way to the castle together, talking about the Vignemal property all the time.”

“What did he have to say?”

“He said that he would have nothing to do with us and our *suit*, and even pretended that he was ready to give up his own share of the fortune.”

“He must know that he is suspected.”

“I think he does, for he spoke of hearing ‘foolish rumors;’ and he said that he despised them and would soon put a stop to them, and that he didn’t want any of the money.”

“He will not be so haughty when he finds that a warrant is out for his arrest, I fancy. I will go to the attorney, and tell him that he need not wait any longer for proof that Pontac and Ferrer are in league together.”

“What good will that do us poor people—me and my cousin?” asked Pierre Lemale.

“It will do you this much good—that Mons. du Pourméval will not get possession of the property; the civil suit can not come off until the criminal

one is decided, and Roland Ferrer, though he will not confess to drowning Mme. Vignemal, will very likely certify that she was living when he saw her on the bank; and that is all I want, to win the case. You see, Pierre, the court is always inclined to favor the natural heirs, and if there is a doubt they will prefer to see the property go to you and your cousins rather than to a relation of the lady's husband."

"If this turns out as you think, Mons. Vaurinet, we will gladly give you ten per cent for your trouble, but I am afraid we shall never get hold of that Roland; he is a slippery customer to deal with. If I could only have spoken to him—"

"It is not too late—look down there."

"Where? Why, heavens and earth, it is Roland himself!"

"I have had him pointed out to me," said Vaurinet. "I recognized him directly."

"No one would ever mistake Roland Ferrer. But we must stop him, must we not?"

"I should like to find out what he is doing here. He does not come to town three times in a year."

"He does not look as if he wanted to hide himself."

“No, he seems rather to be looking out for something. Come, we will speak to him.”

Roland was walking slowly along the path-way, looking up at the tall buildings whose roofs were just visible above the trees of the square, and he did not see the two men approaching him until he was within three yards of them.

Then he stopped suddenly, as if displeased at the encounter, and seemed half-inclined to turn back; but Vaurinet accosted him in a tone of familiarity.

“How do you do, Roland! Do you not know me?”

“No,” said Roland, staring hard at him. “I have often seen you—with Doctor Sully.”

“Are you a friend of his?”

“Yes, I have known him for a long time.”

“Well, when you see him tell him that I went to his house and did not find him. I have just come from there.”

“You are not going to stay in town, then?”

“I don’t know where I may be this evening, but I shall not see the Doctor again. His servant does not like me; she shut the door in my face and I am afraid she will not tell the doctor of my coming there; so if you would do me the favor—”

“Don’t be uneasy, my lad, I will not forget your message. Did you want to see him about that affair of the ferry?”

Roland looked askant at his questioner without answering him, and Vaurinet added hastily—“You were there when the Vignemals were drowned.”

“Well, and if I was?” said the poacher, dryly.

“Don’t be angry; I wish you no harm,” said Vaurinet, persuasively. “I always take the part of the poor; I am the counsel for Mme. Vignemal’s relations, who have no money and who want to appear against a fine gentleman.”

“Against Mons. du Pourméval?” cried Roland; “I hope they will succeed.”

“I see that you do not love him, and you are right. You can help us to prevent him from getting this property; you have only to declare before the court what you saw at the river.”

“You don’t know that I saw anything.”

“I do, for Lieut. Pontac told me so.”

“Who is Lieut. Pontac?”

“You don’t know him?” cried Vaurinet and Lemale together; “and you were talking to him yesterday evening by the river, on the road to La Geraldine!”

“Then you were spying on me. It is true I met

a gentleman on that road, but I do not know what his name is, and I never saw him before."

"Perhaps you don't know that he is as near a relation to Mme. Vignemal as I am," said Lemale.

"That is nothing to me," answered the poacher, shrugging his shoulders; "but I am in a hurry, and I wish that instead of asking me useless questions you would tell me how to get to the court. I want to see the prosecuting attorney."

"Indeed! He has sent you a *summons*, then?"

"He has not sent me anything, but I want to see him."

"I know that it is about this Vignemal, and if you will confide in me I can give you good advice."

"I asked you the way to the court, and I want nothing else of you."

"Well, don't be so sulky; I spoke for your own good. You don't know anything of law and you will be sure to get yourself into trouble; but that is your own affair, I suppose. You want to go to the court-house; do you see that path that runs along by the wall of the old convent? Follow that till you come to the sub-prefect's house; then turn to the right and you will go straight to the

court, and the janitor will show you to the attorney's office."

"Thanks," said Roland, walking on.

"Take care," Vaurinet called after him; "the prison is next door to the council-hall; don't make a mistake!" But Roland Ferrer took no notice of him, and when he was out of sight Pierre Lemale turned to Vaurinet, saying:

"You are wiser than I am, Monsieur, and I suppose you know how to manage this affair; but for the life of me I cannot see why you let that fellow slip through your fingers without getting a word out of him about this business."

"He is going to the prosecuting attorney—to talk about the accident. What would you have more?"

"I would like to know what he is going to say, for he is as likely to be against us as with us."

"Pierre, my friend, you have very little sense," said the lawyer slowly; "do you not see that to be *against* us is to be *with* du Pourméval? And what did Roland say when I spoke of your suing the gentleman?"

"He said, 'I hope you will succeed;' but still," said Lemale, discontentedly, "how is Roland to

know what to say to the attorney? He has not read the code."

"Roger Pontac has, though, and you may be sure that he and Roland were not talking about the weather when you saw them on the road by the river. Soldiers are just as sly as other people; he knows well enough that his chance of inheriting depends upon the poacher's testimony."

"He told me that he was going to see the attorney himself."

"Not he. That was only boasting. He has sent Roland instead, after telling him just what to say; and the attorney will listen to him attentively, I know. Whether he will send the poacher to prison and issue a warrant of arrest against the army-officer, the friend of a nobleman, I cannot say; but what I am convinced of is, that the matter is progressing finely."

"Then we have nothing to do but to sit down and fold our arms."

"Exactly. The wind is blowing in the right direction; we have only to let it blow. This evening I shall go and smoke a pipe with my friend the attorney, and then I shall hear all we want to know; so come to see me to-morrow morning. Remember, now, not a word of this to your rela-

tions at Grand-champ, for it would make a talk if it were known that I had the inside-track with the attorney."

"I shall not speak of it," said Lemale; and then he added, with a chuckle, "I would give a half-crown to be behind a curtain in the attorney's office at this minute!"

"Yes, Roland must be there by this time; he was walking so fast. But we must not stay here any longer; there is nothing for us to do at present. Go home, my friend, and don't fret yourself—it will be all right."

Mons. Vaurinet was very good at guessing, but he made a mistake on one point; Roland Ferrer was not yet in the presence of the magistrate. On arriving at the esplanade the young man stopped to collect his thoughts and to look, perhaps for the last time, at the broad forest-land in which he had lived free and happy for many years.

From where he stood there was a fine view of La Geraldine and the rugged hills where the Beuvron took its source, and Roland leaned his arm upon the balustrade which enclosed the platform, and wondered whether he should ever see that loved spot again.

He had been trying the whole night to persuade

himself that it would be better to obey Miss Dandria than to sacrifice his liberty to his vengeance.

He had asked himself whether he should be able to survive her marriage with Du Pourméval, and then he had cried aloud in the darkness of his lonely hut: "I could not bear it, I should shoot him at the door of the church, and then kill myself, too! But if I prevent him from inheriting this fortune he will not marry her; I shall go to prison, but she will know what I have done; she will understand that I have sacrificed myself to save her from the man she hates."

He was turning this over in his mind, when a hand was laid on his shoulder and a familiar voice exclaimed, cheerily:

"What the mischief are you doing here, my lad?"

"Major Sully!" cried Roland, turning round joyfully.

"Yes, it is I," replied the Doctor, with a smile; "are you so surprised to see me? I am more astonished at finding you so far from the Beuvron, and in a brown study, too."

"I have been to your house, but they said you were out. I wanted to wait till you came home, but—"

"Jeannette shut the door in your face, I suppose; she is eccentric; but it does not matter now, since I have met you. What induced you to leave your kennel in the woods? Have you broken any more bones?"

"No, major."

"Roland always called the Doctor *major*, which greatly pleased the ex-army surgeon.

"Then what is the matter? Have you been getting into trouble with the keepers?"

"No, major, the keepers don't molest me now; and besides, I have not set a trap or caught a fish for a week."

"Is that true? Then you must be reformed. Are you going to work at last?"

"I don't know how to work."

"You could learn. But what can you have been doing all this time? Day-dreaming I'll wager! You have spent your time in that way lately, and now I find you dreaming on the esplanade. I see you are in love!"

"*In love!* I?" repeated Roland, blushing scarlet to the tips of his ears.

"Why not?" asked his friend, good-humoredly; "you are at just the age for—"

"What woman would have me?"

"Many a woman, I am sure. You are too modest, my lad. Why, the daughter of the first farmer you engaged yourself to would marry you, if only for the sake of your brown eyes."

"I don't wish to marry," said Roland, turning away slowly.

"There is plenty of time for that, but I advise you to change your way of living immediately, for there are very ugly stories afloat concerning you. Do you know that they say you played a suspicious part in the Vignemal affair? Even Mons. Dandria, who lauded you to the skies on the night of the accident, believes now that you drowned Mme. Vignemal.

"You will certainly be arrested, and our new attorney has evidently made up his mind beforehand that you are guilty. I heard how he cross-questioned you at Fougeray, and tried his best to make you contradict yourself. He did not succeed, but he will not give up his idea very quickly; he is a man with whom I would not care to have dealings. I just passed him in the courthouse, where I have been to see Mons. Lestrignon."

"The attorney is in his office, then?"

"I suppose so, but what difference does it make to you whether he is or not?"

"I want to see him."

"You? Ah, then he has sent for you?"

"No, I came here of my own accord."

"On purpose to see a man who is your enemy, and wishes you no good! You are crazy."

"No, major; I know very well what I am doing. I wanted to see you first to tell—"

And as Roland hesitated the Doctor went on, cheerfully:

"Well, you can tell me now just as well, I am sure. What was it you wanted to say to me?"

"That I lied to you, major," said the young man, in a low voice.

"What about?"

"About—what happened on the bank of the Beuvron."

"What!" the doctor fairly gasped; "don't tell me that you did drown Mme. Vignemal."

"I did not drown her, but I could have prevented the accident, for I knew that the ferry-rope was rotten."

"Oh, that is it!" said the Doctor with a sigh of relief. "Well, they could not hang you for that, even if they knew of it."

"I am going to the prosecuting attorney to tell him," said Roland.

"You are a fool, Roland Ferrer! Do you want to be sent to the court of assizes? They will examine and cross-examine you until they *make* you commit yourself, however innocent you may be."

"I am not altogether innocent," said Roland, and then he proceeded to give the Doctor the startling information which he had already communicated to Ernestine Dandria.

"My dear boy, you should have told me this before," said Dr. Sully gravely; "but to confess it now would be to confirm the suspicions of the magistrate who is already prejudiced against you, for you would prove yourself a liar. What induced you to be more frank now than you were at first?"

"I heard that the lady's relations would not be able to inherit her fortune unless it were proved that she lived longer than her husband; it would be unjust to them for me to conceal what I know."

"A very noble sentiment that! But may I ask why you take so much interest in these people, whom you do not know?"

"They are poor."

"Not as poor as you are. In fact, one of them is an officer in the army, Roger Pontac—"

"The gentleman who lives at the castle?"

"You know him, then. Was it he who advised you to go to the attorney?"

"No, major, he did not tell me who he was. I met him yesterday evening by the river, but he only said that he was a friend of yours."

"Ah, I knew that Roger would not try to make a victim of you. For whose sake is it, then, that you want to sacrifice yourself?"

"For no one's, major," said Roland, uneasily; "but there is the other heir; you know who I mean—Mons. Vignemal's nephew."

"Arthur du Pourméval! Are you afraid that when he becomes master of Fougeray he will declare war against poachers?"

"I should not be afraid of him. It is not that at all; but he is going to marry one of the young ladies at La Geraldine, is he not?"

"Yes, the younger one; but what is that to you?"

"The *younger* one! Did you say the *younger* one?" cried Roland, starting up suddenly; "did you say it was *Germaine* he is to marry?"

"Certainly," replied the Doctor dryly; "I said it was the younger one, but it would be more becoming in you to speak of her as *Miss Germaine*.

You have not told me why you care so much who Mons. du Pourméval marries, though."

"You are sure it is the younger one?" repeated Roland.

"Yes, yes, boy; it was I who carried his offer to Madame. What is the matter with you! You seem to be completely overwhelmed."

"It is joy, major, joy."

"Then are you glad that Mons. du Pourméval is to marry into the Dandria family? A minute ago you were conspiring to deprive him of his inheritance!"

"I don't care now who inherits."

"Why not, *now*?"

"Because I know more than I did before. It is *Germaine*, you say, and you would not deceive me, major."

"Why should I wish to do so? She has almost accepted him; he is there every day, and the thing will, in all probability, be decided before they return to Paris."

"If I were only *sure*!" murmured Roland to himself, and then, bowing his head upon his breast, he abandoned himself to his thoughts, entirely unconscious of his friend's presence.

The two were all alone on the esplanade, for the

people of Arcy preferred walking on the Rue Nationale, not caring to look at the landscape in winter from a spot which was fully exposed to the west wind.

Mons. Vaurinet and his client had left Merwin Park, blissfully ignorant of the fact that their plot was about to be seriously disarranged; and Dr. Sully, looking fixedly at the young man before him, began to guess what was passing through his mind.

"Roland," he said, softly, after a long silence, "you have concealed something from me."

"I, major?" stammered the Bohemian. No, I swear—"

"Do not swear, my friend, for you would only lie! Confess, rather, that you have conceived a preposterous passion for Miss Dandria."

Roland made no answer, but his face told that the Doctor had guessed aright.

"That is what you meant by staring at her so, in the kitchen the other night. I noticed it, but I never dreamed that you had so far taken leave of your senses as to fancy yourself *in love* with a lady who thinks of you no more than she thinks of her gardner."

"I know that to *her* it is as if I did not exist," answered Roland, in a low tone.

"And you love her just the same; is that it? Ah, well, I suppose you will say that you cannot help it. That is a great pity, for you might as reasonably fall in love with the daughter of the emperor of China. It is a case of *mental* malady that I must try to cure you of. First tell me how and when this began."

"When? The day that I first saw her very close, a long time ago; she was walking on the terrace by the Beuvron and I was hidden under the tamarisks. *How* it began I do not know; but I felt all of a sudden that until that moment *I had not lived!*"

"As bad as that!" said the Doctor, smiling; why your case is worse than I thought it was. And what did you do after experiencing this thunder-stroke?"

"I followed her, without her knowing it; wherever she went, I went."

"You never have spoken to her?"

"Never."

Roland did not hesitate for more than a second before answering, but the Doctor noticed it, and his face darkened.

He was enough of a sceptic to doubt the complete discretion of young ladies, however well brought up they might be, and he could not decide whether Roland was sincere, or merely *discreet*.

"Your reserve is praiseworthy under the circumstances," he said, slowly; "nevertheless, your game is a dangerous one, not only for you but for her. You are aware, I suppose, that she could not marry you?"

Roland bowed assent.

"Well, then, your conduct—this ridiculous hiding in bushes and following her through the woods—can have no other result than to compromise her. And now, since you acknowledge that your absurd passion can end only in your losing the little sense you possess, will you tell me what you expect to gain by preventing Mons. du Pourméval's marrying?"

"I don't care whether he marries or not; I told you that before."

"Because Miss Germaine and not her sister is to be the bride. If it was to have been Miss Ernestine you would have gone and accused yourself of a lot of crimes which you never committed, and represented yourself as a criminal tormented by remorse. And all that for the pleasure of

injuring a gentleman who has never done or even wished you any harm! You cannot make me believe that Mme. Vignemal recovered consciousness and crept to the foot of the terrace while you were gone."

"It is true, major, I assure you; and she dropped a leather case, a sort of pocket-book; and I found it the next day, and hid it."

"It is possible, Roland?" cried the Doctor, in astonishment; "that alters matters considerably; for the case may contain valuable papers—perhaps a will. It may turn out a real Pandora's box! You don't know what that means, do you? You will understand me well enough, though, when I tell you that you will probably be accused of stealing that case. You had better leave it where it is for the present, for I should not like to take the responsibility of it at this critical juncture; but when you are safely out of the way I could give it to whoever has the best right to it. But first, let us settle your affairs. You have, I hope, given up the absurd idea of going to the attorney."

"Yes, I have given it up, because it is not Miss Ernestine who is to be married. You said it was not, major."

“Do you want me to give you my word of honor, Roland?”

“No, no; I believe you—.”

“Then follow the advice I give you; for if not you will get into serious trouble. You cannot live in this place any more; so you must leave it—at once.”

“Why so? I have lived here till now; why can I not do as I have always done?”

“You have been tolerated here—that is all. People have grown accustomed to you, and have forgiven you for pranks which in any other person would be misdemeanors. The Vignemals have never made any serious endeavors to rid their place of you, because they knew that the little game you stole was not sold, but used for your own sustenance. This could not last forever, unfortunately, for people will pass over many things in a boy which they will not pardon in a man; and now the attention of everyone has been drawn to you by this fatal accident in the river. You will be arrested and subjected to a searching examination; you will be between two fires; for if you do not tell what you know Mme. Vignemal's heir's will be down on you, as they suspect that you have it in your power to materially assist their

cause ; and, on the other hand, if you speak out frankly you will have to deal with the magistrates, who will handle you without gloves—be assured of that. They would have pounced on you before if it had not been that they also suspect a young fellow who is more innocent than you in this matter. In short, there is nothing for you to do but to leave the country.”

“ You want me to become a soldier ? ”

“ Exactly.”

“ So does the officer who lives at Bretteville.”

“ It is your true vocation, and there is nothing to keep you here.”

“ Nothing,” repeated Roland, sadly.

“ Come, have done with these foolish fancies and be a man ; I will answer for your future. Go to Pontac at once and ask him to help you.”

“ He is expecting me to-day.”

“ So he told me, and you would have done better to go to him instead of showing yourself here in town. But I want to see him on one or two matters myself ; so I will write and ask him to call at my house and we will arrange about getting you off. Come to me the day after to-morrow, and be prepared to go away at once ; Jeannette will have orders to let you in. In the meantime

keep as quiet as possible, and do not show yourself to any one. By the way, Roland, did you meet any body you knew, as you were coming here?"

"Yes, down there in the Park. I was stopped by two men. One was a fellow I saw yesterday, a cousin of Mme. Vignemal; the other one said he was a friend of yours, but he did not tell me his name."

"What sort of man was he?"

"Small and thin and yellow, with a long pointed nose and red eye-lids. He looked like a fox."

"Did he wear black clothes and a white cravat?"

"Yes, and he was carrying a big leather portfolio under his arm."

"It was that rascal Vaurinet! I remember hearing that he had undertaken to plead for the heirs of Mme. Vignemal. And so he has the impudence to claim acquaintance with me, has he? He would not dare to speak to me if he passed me in the street. I hope you were not taken in by him?"

"Indeed I was, major. I begged him to do me the favor to tell you that I had been to see you, and I asked him to tell me the way to the attorney's office."

"Heavens! That is unfortunate; he is hand and

glove with the attorney, and is sure to tell him you are coming; so, when they find you have altered your mind, they will send the police for you. Mark my words, Roland—do not sleep to-night on the banks of the Beuvron; choose some other hiding-place, and come to me about eleven o'clock at night, by the quietest road you know;" and the Doctor honored his protégé with a warm grasp of the hand.

"No more nonsense," my lad, he added, smiling; but Roland was at that moment thinking to himself that he could never leave France without seeing Ernestine Dandria once more.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE shooting-party in Brétêche Forest was a great event to the quiet people of La Geraldine, and the day before it was to come off nothing else was talked or thought about. But Mme. Dandria was half-angry with herself for having consented to her daughter's taking part in the expedition, for she disapproved entirely of all the violent sports which foreigners had introduced into France. *Lawn-tennis*, the game so popular on the other side of the channel, she considered more fitted to develop the muscles of boys than to form the morals or manners of young girls. It was impossible, however, to retract her acceptance of the Duke's invitation, and neither was she willing to allow her daughters to go to the shooting-party without her, for she knew that her brother was quite capable of forgetting all about his nieces in the excitement of the occasion. This Uncle Armand was obliged to acknowledge, but he proposed to his sister-in-law, by way of conciliation, perhaps, that she could accompany them in her carriage as spectator of

the sport, for the forest roads were broad and level, and the two mares were not at all apt to start at unusual sounds.

The plan was simple and practical, and Mme. Dandria agreed to it all the more readily as Ernestine declared that she, too, would stay in the carriage, having no more taste than her mother for murdering harmless animals.

After a lively discussion Mme. Dandria was persuaded to let her other daughter take an active part in the proceedings. Germaine had often begged her uncle to allow her to accompany him when he went shooting, which he always refused on the ground that the long walks he took in search of game would be too much for her; he consented, however, to teach her to shoot, and even had a little rifle made in Paris expressly for her use. The lessons were given on the banks of the river, where there were always a great many birds, and in a very short time Germaine became so proficient in the use of the rifle that she could easily bring down a wild pigeon, when on the wing.

It was agreed, therefore, that she should be allowed to put her new accomplishment to use on this occasion, and she made a solemn promise to be

as cool as one of the Old Guard, never to fire off her gun at hap-hazard for the mere pleasure of making a noise, not to leave her place under any pretext whatever, and in short to follow all Mons. Pontac's directions implicitly.

These precautions taken, the party set out, Germaine attired in a very becoming Breton costume, with a red handkerchief tied loosely round her neck; Alfred in knee-breeches, and a broad-brimmed hat with a pointed crown, looking very like an Italian brigand, and Uncle Armand in his usual sporting-suit.

They had gone some distance from La Geraldine, when they heard a deep barking behind them. The carriage-horses pricked up their ears knowingly, and Alfred, who was sitting with the coachman, turned round, exclaiming in an angry tone :

“It is Belt following us ! The deuce take the brute ; what will Lieut. Pontac think of us ? Germaine, you must be at the bottom of this.”

“Indeed I shut Belt in my own room when I came down stairs,” she replied. “One of the servants must have let him out.”

“Well, we should look like a set of idiots, going

out to shoot with that dog at our heels. I've a great mind to put a bullet through his head."

"You would do better, my boy, to get down and go back with him to the house," said Mons. Dandria. "You could lock him in the stable, then mount Ralph and rejoin us at Lamon Rock."

"Ride through the country in this get-up? I must ask to be excused, Uncle! Pourméval would tell every fellow in Arcy and I should never hear the last of it. Besides, when we get to the rendezvous we can muzzle the confounded beast and tie him to a tree."

"I shall not allow anything of the kind," put in Ernestine; "Belt is not accustomed to such treatment. Mamma and I shall keep him with us. Shan't we, you dear old fellow?" she said, looking round at the dog, who was bounding joyfully along beside the carriage.

"Well, if he takes it into his head to jump out and frighten away the game it will be all the worse for him; he may get a dose of cold lead!" grumbled Alfred.

No one took any notice of his threat, but Ernestine reddened indignantly, and then looked with loving eyes at the dog and thought that she owed

him some gratitude for having accompanied her on her nocturnal excursion.

“Without him,” she thought, “I should not have dared to go into the garden to find Roland Ferrer; and then I should not have discovered that there is one man sincerely and entirely devoted to me, nor that I could, if I wished, cause Arthur du Pourméval to lose this fortune with which he expects to dazzle my little sister.”

Her reverie was disturbed by Germaine’s exclaiming, gaily:—

“What a beautiful day we have for our expedition; it is as mild as spring! It seemsto me that Mons. Pontac is a bird of good-omen to us, for just see how dull and miserable we were when he appeared on the scene. Now, everything is as gay as possible; I, for one, want to stay here all winter.”

“What a pity that that fine-looking young lieutenant has nothing but his pay,” said Uncle Armand suddenly. “He may want to be thinking of marrying, one of these days, poor fellow.”

“I don’t pity him at all,” replied Germaine, “for he seems to be very well contented with his lot; he loves fighting better than anything, and some day he will be a general, probably.”

“Suppose the Castle of Brettville and Brétèche Forest belonged to him, and that he should offer himself to Ernestine! She could not wish for a more charming husband; and then, with you, Germaine, married to du Pourméval, the three places would be joined—Fougeray, La Geraldine, and Brettville; heavens, what a glorious place for sport! I would take up my permanent abode with you, Queen.”

“That would all be very delightful, Uncle Armand, if it were only true,” said Germaine; “but as it is nothing but a fancy we shall have to content ourselves with the Duke’s permission to shoot in his forest.

“You are right, my dear, and it seems to me that we must be very near our destination by this time. I see a sort of rocky gorge over there.”

“The rendezvous is an open space directly at the foot of Lamon Rock,” put in Germaine. “We cannot mistake it, for the fairy palace looks just like a great tower on the top of a hill.”

“But what makes *you* so wise?” inquired Mme. Dandria.

“Mons. Pontac described the place to me the other evening, and I would take the trouble to

climb to the top of the Rock if I were in your place, Ernestine," she said, turning to her sister.

"I have nothing to ask of the fairies," replied Ernestine; but Germaine persisted, laughingly:

"It cannot do any harm to try them; for if they have no husband to offer they say nothing at all, and they are very discreet; they were never known to betray a confidence; you had better *try* at all events; there is no knowing what may happen!"

"I can see du Pourméval's dog-cart!" cried Alfred suddenly. "He has just got out, and there are a lot of other people, too. Of course they are all waiting for us—confound this slow old coach!"

"There is no fear of the mares running away with us, at any rate," said Uncle Armand, "as your dear Ralph is fond of doing; and what is the harm of our arriving the last on the scene? Of course Arthur du Pourméval would make a point of being the first; that is the duty of a wooer."

"I see Mons. Pontac," said Germaine, standing up in the carriage; "he is talking to one of the servants."

"Where are the hounds?" cried Alfred; "I know the Duke has a pack of at least sixty."

"They will not be out to-day, you foolish boy,"

said his uncle, smiling at his eagerness; "they are used only for a *hunt*; we shall be on foot, and those people you see are to beat the bushes for us."

A few minutes later the carriage reached the open space in the centre of which stood Lamon Rock, rugged and gigantic, and near by was a well-filled lunch table, temporarily erected, and presided over by three liveried footmen.

"Our lieutenant of hussars is a host and master-of-ceremonies of the first order!" said Mons. Dandria; "you need not have worried about having our dinner-hour altered, Queen, for this is a feast that would satisfy the most fastidious."

"Mons. du Pourméval seems to appreciate it, at all events," said Germaine, pointing to the gentleman in question, who was at that instant putting down a large bumper which he had just emptied.

"He is laying in stock, in view of the exertions he expects to make," said Uncle Armand. "You would not have him drink water."

"It is the only proper beverage for lovers," replied Germaine.

"For very cold ones; and that is not the kind you and Ernestine approve of, I am sure."

Ernestine made no reply, and turned away her

head to avoid seeing Arthur du Pourméval, who was coming toward them, hat in hand, and a smile on his lips.

The carriage stopped, and while its occupants were alighting Roger Pontac came up to welcome them.

"I am afraid it is very early for ladies to be out," he said, after an exchange of greetings; "but at this time of year the days are so short that it does not do to begin a *battue* much later."

"There is any quantity of game, is there not?" said Germaine, taking up her rifle.

"Yes, for there have been no sportsmen in the Forest this year," answered Pontac; "and the keepers tell me that the woods are full of deer and pheasants. By the way, the Duke told me to request particularly that a certain old stag should not be molested. It is one which his son often used to hunt but was never able to capture. It can be recognized easily by its antlers which have ten points."

"It would be murder to kill a stag with a rifle-ball," said Mons. Dandria; and Germaine added: "I should so like to meet the animal, for I have never yet seen a stag in its wild state; it must be superb!"

"Yes, and so is a lion," replied her uncle. "I advise you, my dear, not to interfere with the beast if he should chance to pass you, for those immense antlers are formidable weapons, I can assure you. Now, Mons. Pontac," he added, "are we ready to set out? My sister and her other daughter want to follow us in the carriage. They have not much taste for sport."

"The roads are good," said Pontac, "so Madame and her daughter will drive very comfortably. You must excuse me from taking part in shooting, Monsieur; I think it best to conduct the *battue* in person, for the old keeper would not be able to manage the somewhat unruly peasants whom I have engaged to beat the bushes for us. But how did this dog get here?" he asked, in surprise, putting his hand on Belt's head, the sagacious brute having recognized him and come for a caress.

"He followed us without permission," said Germaine, "but he will not get in the way; my sister will keep him with her."

The party then turned toward the forest; Mme. Dandria and Ernestine took their seats in the carriage again, and Belt, at a sign from his young mistress, leaped in obediently and lay down at her feet.

Arthur du Pourméval was not at his ease that day ; he was unusually silent and seemed to have lost a great deal of his easy, self-possessed air. It might have been that the presence of Ernestine oppressed him, or perhaps he was beginning to be jealous of Roger Pontac.

He knew that his own get-up was faultless, for his dog-cart came from Paris ; his horse cost eight hundred dollars ; his groom looked as if he had just come from England in a band-box ; his rifle was a *choke-bored* bought in London (at Purdey's, gunsmith to the aristocracy) ; his clothes had been cut by the first tailor of Paris—in short, Mons. du Pourméval was irreproachable. And yet he was dissatisfied, for he suspected that Pontac's simple attire and natural elegance were more apt to please Germaine's fancy than was his own dandy attire.

Roger Pontac was not dressed like a man in a fashion-plate ; he had come to the rendezvous on foot, and did not even care to display his skill with the rifle. His manner was reserved, slightly distant, even, as if he were a lord of the manor, doing the honors of his forest to his less noble guests ; but under all this *hauteur* and indifference there were distinguishable an ardent temperament

and an iron will; one could see in his eyes that he knew how to command—and to love.

“It is fortunate that he has not a *son* to his name,” said Arthur, uneasily; but he was consoled at seeing that Germaine seemed to take no special interest in the young lieutenant, being absorbed in her pretty little rifle, and apparently all impatience to begin to use it.

The *rabatteurs*, in blouses and sabots, went on in front, under the leadership of the keeper from the Castle, and Roger turned to Germaine saying, “Would you like to shoot rabbits first, mademoiselle?”

“I like everything to-day,” she answered.

“Well, there is a spot very near here where there is always an abundance of small game. We had better go there first.”

They took the road to the left, and Germaine contrived to walk between Pontac and her uncle. Alfred was a few steps in advance of them, and du Pourméval joined him, as he had no desire to be near the carriage, which was following the pedestrians.

After about ten minutes' walk they entered the forest and arrived at a narrow glade which was separated by a thin copse from the carriage-road,

and Roger Pontac proceeded to place his guests in order of battle.

Alfred was put at one end of the line, not more than sixty paces from his uncle, Arthur at the other end, and Germaine between the latter and Mons. Dandria.

Mme. Dandria watched these arrangements with great interest, but Ernestine took no notice of what was going on, but kept her eyes fixed musingly on Belt, who was lying with his nose resting on his outstretched paws, like a marble dog on the tomb of some medieval queen. The expression of her face was so sad that her mother could not ignore it, although she had hitherto refrained from questioning Ernestine on the subject of Arthur du Pourméval's conduct, which she knew must have caused her daughter great pain.

"What is the matter with you to-day, my dear?" she asked; "you have not said more than three words since we left home. Are you unhappy about anything?"

"No, mamma," answered Ernestine, "the reason that I have not said very much to-day is because I am not interested in the *battue*, and nothing else has been talked about. I should not have

come at all if I had not wanted to please Germaine."

"It would have spoiled her pleasure entirely to have you at home alone—she loves you so dearly."

"And I would gladly suffer all my life if I were sure that she were happy."

"Do you think there is any doubt of her being so? Just see how gay she is."

"She is always gay, for she gives herself no trouble about the future; but I hope she will think twice before she marries."

"So do I, and evidently she thinks as we do, for she has not yet accepted Mons. du Pourméval. She wants to know him thoroughly before she decides."

"It does not seem to me that she is studying his character to-day, and she cannot keep him waiting indefinitely."

"Certainly not. If the marriage is not arranged before we return to Paris it never will be."

"Then she ought to decide at once; Mons. du Pourméval expects to inherit his uncle's money, but his claim will probably be contested; and if he loses the suit, and Germaine then rejects him, people will say that she wanted the money only."

"That is true," said Mme. Dandria, thought-

fully ; “it has never occurred to me—nor to Germaine either, I am persuaded.”

“What I am persuaded of is, that she has no idea of accepting him, and is only amusing herself with him.”

“If I thought that, I would—”

“You would put a stop to her trifling. Very well, question her closely ; she will not lie, but will tell you her secret.”

“Her secret? Do you mean to say that Germaine has a secret?”

“Do you want me to tell you what I know, mamma?”

“I do, most decidedly.”

“She told me that she cared nothing at all for Mons. du Pourméval, and she *almost* said that she loved some one else ; but she is possessed with the idea that I am in love with the splendid Arthur and he with me, and she thinks that he will come back to me when he finds that she does not want him.”

“And it is for that she encourages him is it? Can it be possible that Germaine is guilty of such duplicity—that she prefers some one else, and deliberately misleads Arthur du Pourmeval? I cannot believe it ; she is giddy and thoughtless, but—”

“She thinks that in this case the end will justify the means,” put in Ernestine, hurriedly, “and that is because she consults her affections and not her reason. I told her that I would rather die than be the wife of Arthur du Pourméval, but she would not listen to me.”

“You ought to have told me this before, Ernestine. I shall question your sister to-night, and ascertain whether she means to marry Mons. du Pourméval or not, and whether she is really in love with some one else.

“And who it is,” added Ernestine; “she will tell you everything, I know, for dissimulation is not her forte. I only hope she has chosen wisely, and that she may never be deceived.”

“As you have been, my dear child,” said Mme. Dandria, gently, for she was beginning to read her daughter’s heart; but before Ernestine could reply, a sharp cracking of rifles was heard, and a flock of young partridges flew by.

The rabatteurs had made a wide circuit, and then marched straight forward, beating the bushes and hallooing loudly to start the game.

The sportsmen loaded and fired as fast as they could, and were soon surrounded by little clouds of white smoke. It looked like an attack of the

Advance-guard, nothing being wanting to complete the picture but some red pantaloons and Prussian helmets.

Germaine entered into the sport with intense ardor and displayed great skill, and her mother was filled with wonder at seeing her take the cartridges from her bag, put them into the barrels, raise her rifle, take aim, fire off two shots, and then begin over again as calmly and methodically as if she had done nothing else all her life.

Ernestine took no notice of the sportsmen, but turned her attention to Belt, who, roused suddenly by the noise of the firing, had sat up in astonishment, and showed signs of jumping out of the carriage.

But the skirmish was soon over, and Roger Pontac sent some of the men to gather up the game which had been shot.

Germaine came up to her mother and sister with her gun on her shoulder, her broad Breton hat set jauntily on one side, her eyes sparkling and her face flushed with excitement.

"Nine rabbits and two partridges!" she cried triumphantly as she reached the carriage; "have I not made a brilliant début, mamma? Uncle Armand did not miss aim once, but Alfred hit about

one in ten, and Mons. du Pourméval was just as bad. He might as well have stayed at home."

"Germaine!" exclaimed her mother in a tone of remonstrance; "I am astonished at you. You make me regret our having come here to-day. I shall have to insist on your coming home at once. Besides, I want to talk to you seriously on a very important matter."

"I have no objections, mamma; but you forget that we shall have company to dinner. Uncle has invited Lieutenant Pontac and Mons. du Pourméval; I believe he would have asked the Duke if he had only dared."

The gentlemen, by coming up at that moment, saved Germaine from receiving a reprimand for her levity, and she ran forward to meet Roger Pontac, exclaiming, rapturously:

"Oh, Mons. Pontac, it is delightful; I have *never* enjoyed anything so much before!"

The young officer stammered a reply, blushing so hotly, and so evidently overcome with pleasure at her words, that Ernestine said to herself,

"Can this be the one she loves?"

"Well, my dear Queen," said Uncle Armand gaily, "what do you think of this kind of sport? You do not seem to be very enthusiastic."

"I am afraid Ernestine is not feeling well," replied Mme. Dandria, glad of an excuse for going home.

"Oh, it must be that she has got chilled by sitting still in the carriage, and you will do the same if you do not get out and walk about a little. Why do you not go up to the top of the rock and see the view?"

"The inclosure we are going to attack next reaches right up to Lamon Rock," said Roger Pontac.

"Oh, no, I could not think of climbing that steep wall," cried Mme. Dandria. "It would kill me."

"Then perhaps you and Ernestine would rather return home. We are quite able to walk to La Geraldine, are we not, Germaine?"

"Yes indeed," she answered. "I am too happy to feel tired."

Mme. Dandria saw that her younger daughter was indeed radiant with pleasure and excitement; so she altered her plans suddenly.

"We will stay till you have finished the *battues*," she said, and then they all went back to the open space where the four roads met.

When the sportsmen had partaken of refreshments from the bountiful lunch-table, Roger Pon-

tac again placed them in position for the attack, and then went off with the rabbatteurs to make a long détour.

This part of the forest consisted of venerable beech trees, whose white trunks looked like marble pillars supporting a vaulted roof, and under them spread a carpet of moss from which sprang clumps of waving ferns high enough to conceal deer and other game. These animals had been so little hunted in Brétèche Forest that they were comparatively tame, and would come out of their covers and wander about almost on the road-side.

It was on this road that Mme. Dandria's carriage stopped, and in front of it at a short distance were the sportsmen, standing in the same order as before—Albert and Arthur at the two ends of the line, Germaine and her uncle in the middle.

As she stood there, waiting the coming of the game, with her rifle on her arm, her eyes and ears on the alert, and her heart beating with expectation, Germaine began thinking of Roger Fontac, and comparing his modest, simple bearing with that of Arthur du Pourméval, who cared for nothing but spending his money in ostentation, and who thought himself irresistible. She knew it was high time that she told her mother of her de-

cision—that she would not for worlds give her heart to the keeping of the new master of Fougeray ; and she had also another confession to make. As she stood there musing, the dead silence of the forest was rudely broken by the cries of the approaching rabbatteurs, and at the same instant she saw, a few yards before her, the graceful head and throat of a roe-buck lifted suddenly from behind a clump of tall ferns.

The animal did not see her, and she raised her gun to fire ; and as she was about to pull the trigger the roe-buck turned round and looked at her calmly with its soft, dark eyes, but did not move, mistaking her, perhaps, for one of the little shepherds who often came to let their cows graze by the road-side.

“ I cannot kill it,” said Germaine, lowering her gun. “ I will wait until it runs ; if it gets away so much the better ; I only hope that Alfred will not see it.”

She had just been killing rabbits and partridges with all the zest in the world, but she would not hunt this buck, who was not a whit more deserving of her pity. Compassion is such a complex sentiment of the human heart ! It depends to a great extent upon circumstances ; during a battle a sol-

dier will unhesitatingly slaughter a man whom the day before he would have helped if he had met him. It is an affair of nerves, too, for cries of distress often move to pity the hardest heart, while few consider the sufferings of creatures who are unable to complain. No one is much affected by the tortures a lobster undergoes on being put alive into scalding water!

Germaine's sensibilities had not yet been put to any severe test, for the small game she shot fell at a distance from her, so that she did not witness their dying agonies, and all the game was afterward gathered up by the rabbatteurs.

In war, during a temporary cessation of hostilities or before the battle begins, the sentinels of the hostile armies will not think of firing upon each other, but the moment the trumpets sound the charge every man will rush on his enemy bayonet in hand. It is the same in hunting; there is no honor in hitting game that does not move, one might as well shoot at a target, so that a deer is a fellow-creature all the while it stands still, but the instant it stirs it is only *game*—to be shot down without mercy.

Germaine understood this and was sorry to see, as the rabbatteurs drew nearer, driving the

game before them, that the buck she had spared made straight for the line of the sportsmen, passing between her brother and herself. In an instant he fired, and the poor beast fell, rose again, staggered on for a few steps, then dropped once more and dragged himself along the ground to within a yard or two of Mme. Dandria's carriage, where he lay bleeding and kicking convulsively. Ernestine could not bear the sight.

"It is horrible!" she cried, opening the door of the carriage and stepping out, followed closely by her dog, while Mme. Dandria, no less affected, called to the coachman to drive on a little farther.

"I will not stay here another moment," said Ernestine. "I am going up to the top of the rock to wait till this horrid sport is over."

"I would like nothing better than to go with you, but I do not dare to lose sight of your sister; she is so excited that there is no telling what folly she may commit; but are you not afraid to climb that rock alone, Ernestine? It looks so desolate."

"I shall have Belt with me, and besides you will be able to see me all the time—I shall not go round the other side, and directly you make a sign for me I shall come down again."

“Very well, my dear, I know you will be prudent.” Ernestine set off and began climbing Lamon Rock, Belt bounding on before her and stopping every now and then to look back and bark joyfully. The higher she went the purer and lighter became the air, and a cool breeze fanned her burning face; before her lay, like a panorama, the broad forest with the blue hills beyond; the sky was of a pale, grayish hue; a solitary eagle hovered far above her head, no sound breaking the stillness but the distant cracking of the rifles; and the turrets and pinnacles of the fairy-palace rose grand and solitary on every side. As she stopped suddenly to regain breath after the steep ascent she saw Belt running about excitedly, with his nose to the ground as if he had scented something and was anxious to follow up the clue. “What is the matter?” she asked in surprise, and then, looking round her, saw in the granite wall a small, dark hole, the very one which had served Roger Pontac and Germaine as a speaking-tube a few days before.

Ernestine walked slowly round an angle of the rock, wondering all the time what Belt’s behavior could mean; and then looking down toward the forest she saw the spot she had left—the servants

in charge of the lunch-table, the dog-cart with its English groom, and the carriage in which sat Mme. Dandria, who waved her handkerchief on seeing her daughter. Then, going a few steps farther, Ernestine was astonished at seeing in the upright rock another fissure wide enough to admit a man, and, like her sister, she felt half frightened at the sight of the dark, gloomy chasm. Could it be that some one was concealed there? She turned round uneasily and called Belt, who, after some delay, came running up to her, still smelling the ground; but the moment he caught sight of the large opening in the rock he stopped short, stepped back a little, and then, with a deep bark, leaped in and disappeared in the darkness.

CHAPTER XV.

BELT had stormed the fairies' castle ; he had ventured beyond the charmed circle and was nowhere to be seen.

Germaine would have said that the elves were holding him prisoner as a punishment for his audacity, but Ernestine was not given to indulging in such poetic fancies. She knew that either a man or some animal must be concealed in the rock and she would have fled the spot if her trembling limbs had not refused to carry her ; but while she was wondering what would happen next, the dog jumped out of the cleft again, landing directly in front of her and holding in his mouth a small object which he evidently wanted her to take.

What was her surprise on examining his booty to see that it was a square, flat leather case, having on the side a sort of steel button which evidently concealed a lock, and at the top two thin leather cords as if the case had been made to wear hanging from the neck.

How should the dog have chanced to pick up this case, and by what means could it have found its way to Lamon Rock; whose property could it be? Earnestine turned it over curiously and was startled to see on the other side two initials—*V. V.*, in large steel letters, and she remembered suddenly that she had once heard her sister making fun of the rather romantic name of their prosaic neighbor, Virginia Vignemal.

“Then this is the case that Roland Ferrer picked up on the river-bank,” she said, half aloud; “he told me he had hidden it away in a safe place, and who but Belt would have thought of going into that hole in the rock?” Then the question arose in her mind as to what she ought to do with the treasure so unexpectedly put into her care. In all probability it contained valuable papers, perhaps even the whole secret of the inheritance was there. Certainly she had no right to throw the whole thing back into the rock although that would be the easiest way of settling the matter; but it seemed as if Providence had chosen her to be the means of having justice rendered to the dead woman’s relations.

“Were I to give this to Arthur du Pourméval he would not scruple to break it open and destroy

its contents if they were unfavorable to his interests," she said, thoughtfully, "if, on the other hand, I showed it to the magistrate I should be subjected to all sorts of questions; I should be obliged to tell them of my interview with Roland Ferrer in the garden, and the result of which would be that he would be suspected and arrested, and I myself compromised."

All this time, Belt was sitting in front of her, looking earnestly into her face, his ears pricked expectantly, as if awaiting an order, and for a moment Ernestine thought that she might as well give the leather case back to him and let him do as he liked with it.

But then he would be sure to drop it somewhere, or else to put it into the hand of the first acquaintance he happened to meet, Uncle Armand for instance, or still worse, Arthur du Pourméval; that plan would not do at all.

Just as she arrived at this conclusion, she chanced to raise her head suddenly and look toward the aperture in the rock, where she saw a tall, straight figure standing motionless in the darkness, like a statue of Apollo set in a niche. The eyes were fixed on hers, and she started up in a fright when Roland Ferrer's voice said hurriedly:

“Do not be afraid, Miss Dandria. I want to speak to you—without being seen.”

“Why are you in there?” she asked.

“Because I know that they are looking for me. But to-morrow I shall be far away, and I could not bear to go without seeing you again. I thought that perhaps you would come up here to-day and if you had not done so I was going to entreat the Doctor to bring you down to the bank of the Beuvron this evening.”

“Dr. Sully! You have told him then—”

“That I have loved you for three years; but I said that I had never spoken to you. What does it matter, though, since I am going away, and shall very likely never come back again?”

“You have seen Mons. Pontac?”

“Yes, and I am going to leave here to-night; in a week I shall be a soldier.”

“That is right; I am very much pleased with you.”

“Then you will not forget me entirely?”

“Oh, no, indeed; I shall never forget that you were willing to sacrifice yourself to gratify a whim of mine.”

“Do you not care to have that man lose his expected fortune?”

"I am perfectly indifferent about it now ; so indifferent that I wish to return to you this case of Mme. Vignemal's."

"The Doctor has told me that it is not you that Arthur du Pourméval is to marry, but your sister ; and that is why I gave the pocket-book to your dog ; you might have refused to take it from me. If you do not want to open it yourself, give it to Dr. Sully ; he knows the truth about the accident now, and he believes that that case contains papers of great importance. If du Pourméval does not inherit the fortune, Mons. Pontac will."

"*Mons. Pontac !* What do you mean?"

"He is related to Mme. Vignemal."

"And we never knew that. How strange!"

"The doctor could have told you, for he knew Roger Pontac when he was at college. I offered the pocket-book to Mons. Pontac ; I am afraid you are angry with me."

"I? Why should I care?"

"Not for yourself, perhaps, but for your sister."

"She does not love Arthur du Pourméval."

"No? I am delighted to hear that. I offered the case to Lieut. Pontac, because I hate du Pourméval and would do anything to injure him, but Mons. Pontac would have nothing to do with it,

although I told him the whole story of his cousin's death. He has refused to join his other relations in suing du Pourméval for the inheritance."

"There are some noble natures, then," said Ernestine. "I will take the pocket book and do what is right, come what may. And I shall at least have the consolation of knowing that you are safe from calumny." As she spoke Roland Ferrer dropped on one knee before her, his radiant brown eyes swimming in tears.

"If we never meet again," she said, "remember that in France, the land you love, there is one who thinks of and prays for you. Do not kneel to me, Mons. Ferrer."

He rose to his feet at once and murmured, in a shaking voice:

"You are going, now?"

"Yes, my mother is calling me; but I have one more word to say to you. It is *courage*."

"It requires courage for me to tear myself away from you. But I have a favor to ask of you."

"I will grant it."

"Let me write to you sometimes. Not directly to yourself but to the Doctor, for he knows how fondly—how madly I love you. It is you who have marked out my life for me and perhaps you

would like to hear that I am following the road to which you directed me."

"Nothing that happens to you can be a matter of indifference to me," she answered, trying to speak gaily; "so write often to the Doctor, and he will read your letters to me, and reply for me, too. You will want to know perhaps, whether I am alive or dead."

"If I heard that you were dead I should kill myself," he cried.

"But I have no idea of dying just yet, and I am sure that we shall meet again. When you come back an officer our doors will open to welcome you, and I shall tell my mother that long ago, when Lieut. Ferrer was a poor bush-ranger, I had a conversation with him on Lamon Rock.' Ernestine smiled as she spoke and made every effort to conceal her agitation, for she did not want to have an affecting parting-scene, and yet was unwilling to send Roland away despairing and forlorn. She hastened therefore to cut short the interview; and stooping down laid a light kiss on Belt's broad head, then signed him to go to Roland, who, understanding the message, covered the dog with caresses.

"Good-by," she said; "in two, five, ten years,

we shall meet again, here on this spot, if you choose; but we shall hardly recognize each other, for I shall be no longer young, and you will be a fine officer. It is only hearts that do not change."

"Ours will not change," he said, "for I shall always love you, and you will never care anything for me."

"Who can tell?" she said, turning away and leaving him wondering whether he might *hope*. She half regretted her words the moment she had uttered them, and fearing that he would ask in which sense he was to take them she made all the haste possible to get down the rocky pathway and rejoin her mother. The mysterious pocket-book she hid in her bosom, not knowing at the moment what final disposition she would make of it.

Mme. Dandria was still in her carriage, which, however, had moved out of sight of the shooting which was going on with unabated ardor.

"What have you been doing up there so long?" she asked, as Ernestine and the dog approached her.

"I have been admiring the view, and then Belt went into a cavern and would not come out at first—"

“What is that?” cried Mme. Dandria, suddenly. “I hear a cry; what can it be?—Perhaps they have been attacked by a wild boar or a wolf,” she added, turning pale at the thought.

“Oh, no, Mamma, there are no boars here. Uncle said so, and wolves always run away when they see so many people.”

She would not have spoken so confidently if she had known what was taking place in the forest at that moment. The *battue* was just over, all the game having either made its escape or been killed, and the sportsmen were resting on their arms, when suddenly an immense stag started up from the bushes where he had been lying in perfect security, knowing by experience that no one would interfere with him.

Roger Pontac came upon him unexpectedly, and the animal got up and set off at an easy trot toward the sportsmen, Pontac following to warn his guests that this was the veteran whose life was to be spared.

“Do not fire!” he cried, and Mons. du Pourméval, Uncle Armand, and Germaine understood him and let the animal pass unmolested, the girl turning round to admire the graceful form and the large branching antlers with the ten points. The

stag was making for the road and had just passed Alfred when the boy, carried away with the excitement of the moment raised his gun and fired, and the King of the Forest stopped suddenly. Slightly wounded, and rendered furious by the attack, he turned back instantly and Germaine being the first one he saw rushed toward her with lowered head. The girl had the presence of mind to slip behind the trunk of the beech-tree against which she had been leaning, and the stag not being able to stop himself went a few steps past her, then returned to the attack with increased fury. Alfred was powerless with fright, Arthur du Pourméval was too far off to be of any assistance, and Mons. Dandria dared not fire lest he should hit Germaine; his gun, besides, was loaded with small shot which in this case would have had but little effect.

Roger Pontac was the only one who could help her, for he wore in his belt a knife which he had borrowed from the head-keeper, and whose long, sharp, narrow blade had finished many a stag and wild boar in its day.

Roger had purposely armed himself with this weapon, thinking that it might possibly be needed, and the moment he had involuntarily started up

the old stag he thought of Germaine, and hastened after the animal, resolving, however, to let it escape unhurt if it did not attack any one. Before he reached her, the stag had sprung toward her three times and had even made a long rent in her Breton vest, but Germaine eluded him by stepping quickly round to the other side of the tree just as he sprang, and this manœuvre might have lasted till her strength was exhausted if she had not chanced to slip on the dry moss. Then she knew that she was at the mercy of the infuriated animal; but, as she fell, caught sight of Roger running toward her, and she cried, faintly :

“ Help, help ! ”

He threw himself with all his force upon the stag who was just preparing for a final plunge, caught him by the antlers and bore him down, the animal falling on his knees and struggling violently to free himself.

If Roger's strength had failed him at that moment he would have been lost. For an instant every heart stood still; then Alfred hurried away to tell his mother what had happened and the two other gentlemen ran toward Roger; but before they reached him he grasped the knife, which he had been holding between his teeth, and plunged

it into the animal's side. The stag, already weakened by the loss of blood caused by Alfred's shot, gave a last convulsive start, which nearly knocked over his vanquisher, and then fell dead. Roger ran directly to Germaine who had risen to her feet, but had made no attempt to leave the spot, and she held out her hand to him whispering, "Thanks, thanks!"

She could not possibly have done less, under the circumstances, and involuntarily she did a great deal more, for consciousness failed her at that moment and if he had not caught her in his strong arms she would have fallen to the ground. Her mother, her sister, her uncle, her brother, and her lover arrived on the spot a minute afterward, and it would be difficult to describe Mme. Dandria's alarm, Ernestine's and Uncle Armand's astonishment, Alfred's horror, and Arthur's discomfiture at seeing Germaine in the arms of the lieutenant of hussars, with her head resting on his shoulder, his eyes fixed anxiously on her. For a few seconds there was a dead silence, and then every one began talking at once; but Germaine furtively came to herself, raised her head, looked about her wonderingly, and then turned to her mother and threw her arms about her neck.

"My child, you are hurt!" cried Mme. Dandria, seeing that Germaine's dress was splashed with blood.

"Not a bit, mamma," she answered, and Mons. Dandria, shaking Roger Pontac's hand warmly, asked, "and you, my friend—"

"It is the stag's blood, not mine," said Roger.

"Then no harm has been done at all, thanks to you, my brave fellow. How can we ever thank you enough—you have saved my niece's life. But I suppose we ought to take the young lady home and let her recover from her fright. Will you accompany us, Mons. Pontac?"

"Thank you, no; I might be in the way just now, but I should like to call this evening and inquire for Miss Germaine's health."

"We shall be delighted to see you, monsieur," said Mme. Dandria, and then added, "Alfred, call to John to drive up nearer, so that your sister need not walk."

"Why, I feel able to go to the top of Lamon Rock," said Germaine, and just then the crunching of wheels and the cracking of a whip announced the approach of another carriage.

"It is the Doctor!" cried Alfred; "just in the nick of time."

"I thought I should find you all here," cried Dr. Sully, "and though I am no sportsman I wanted to see the fun."

When he heard what had occurred, however, he recommended that Germaine should go home at once, and so her mother hurried her into the carriage. Meanwhile Ernestine approached the Doctor, saying:

"Will you drive me home?" adding in a lower tone, "I want to speak to you particularly," and he, somewhat surprised, assisted her into his little vehicle and took his seat beside her.

Pontac and du Pourméval were hovering about the carriage which contained Germaine, and as she was driven off, the girl looked back at Roger with a smile that spoke volumes. Then the two rivals took leave of each other with but little cordiality and no regret, and the Doctor called Ernestine's attention to their frigid manner, as he took up his reins and set off toward La Geraldine.

"What does it mean?" he asked.

"I cannot say," she answered, "for I was not there when the stag attacked Germaine; but I know that Mons. Pontac killed it, and that no one is hurt, thank Heaven."

"Still, it may be a serious affair. Roger Pon-

tac is a very attractive young man ; he has saved your sister's life and she, of course, owes him some gratitude—whereas she owes du Pourméval nothing at all. And, indeed, if Roger had but inherited Mme. Vignemal's fortune—”

“ Perhaps he has.”

“ What do you mean, Miss Ernestine.”

“ That Roland Ferrer found a pocket-book belonging to Mme. Vignemal.”

“ You have seen Roland, then.”

“ Yes, a little while ago, on Lamon Rock. He is hiding there.”

“ Yes, I advised him not to sleep in his usual burrow again. But how did he dare to speak to you !”

“ He loves me,” she said, simply.

“ I was in hopes that he had got over that ridiculous idea.”

“ I value his love more highly than that of one who would look down upon him,” she said, and the Doctor making no reply she added, after a long pause, “ Do you think it impossible that Roger Pontac will inherit his cousin's money ?”

“ It is not at all likely ; Roland is the only one whose testimony could help him, but Roland is

obliged to leave the country secretly ; so the mystery cannot be unravelled."

"Perhaps the key to it is here," she replied, drawing the leather case out of her bosom.

"Why, that is the famous pocket-book itself!" he cried; "did Roland give it you?"

"Yes, and asked me to give it to you, hoping you would take it to Mons. Lestrigon to open."

"That I can do very easily; but I am afraid it will be found to contain only unimportant memoranda or something of that kind. Mme. Vignemal would not carry her will about with her?"

"That is true," said Ernestine, turning the case over thoughtfully in her hands—"Oh! I have opened it!" she cried, suddenly, as her finger unconsciously pressed the steel spring.

"It was not a lock!" he exclaimed in surprise; "well, I think that as the pocket-book has opened of itself we are perfectly justified in examining the contents. Take out that paper, my dear, and read it to me."

After a moment's hesitation Ernestine did as he desired, and unfolding the paper, which was the sole contents of the pocket-book, she began to read aloud:

"In the event of my dying suddenly I want my husband to take the ebony casket out of my room and give it to my notary, Mons. Bernier, who has the key of it, and tell him to open the casket in the presence of Mons. Lestrigon.

"VIRGINIA VIGNEMAL."

That was all. Ernestine folded up the paper again with a sigh of disappointment, and the Doctor cracked his whip thoughtfully. "If the casket contained a revocation of her will she would not have asked her husband to take charge of it," he remarked.

"That is true," said Ernestine again.

CHAPTER XVI.

No one knew why the rich druggist had built himself an orangery unless it was because the Duke de Bretteville had one; the undertaking was a great success as far as size and appearance went, although the orangery did not contain a single orange-tree, for the druggist disdained to buy young trees and he found it impossible to procure old ones, like those of the Duke, which dated from the reign of Henry IV. Mme. Dandria, when she bought La Geraldine, wisely turned the orangery into a green-house, and the family often spent a whole day there in the cool weather.

On the afternoon of the second day after the memorable *battue* in Brétêche forest, Germaine was in the green-house busily clipping the dead leaves off her favorite plants, and Ernestine sat near her making a copy in *aquarelle* of some *mosaics* which had been sent her by a friend in Nice. At the other end of the long glass gallery

Mme. Dandria and her brother-in-law were talking earnestly together.

"Lieutenant Pontac came here the evening before last, to inquire for Germaine," the lady was saying.

"He could not in courtesy do less, but he did not stay more than five minutes. He would not even wait to see her," replied Uncle Armand.

"I am very glad that he had so much discretion, for, under the circumstances, and after what passed in the forest, it would be exceedingly embarrassing for Germaine to meet him."

"I suppose it would; but how do you account for du Pourméval's non-appearance? We have not seen him since we parted on the road, after the *battue*. Do you think he is angry with us?"

"I cannot say; but indeed it would not grieve me very much if we never saw him again."

"Nor Germaine either. I do not think she cares for him in the least, and, indeed, the lieutenant eclipsed him completely the other day in the forest. The young fellow certainly displayed great courage and presence of mind. Have you questioned Germaine yet, Queen?"

"No, I have not dared."

"Because you dread to hear the truth. What

will you do if she says she is in love with the lieutenant?"

"I shall do my best to show her the absurdity of such a marriage."

"Because he has nothing. She has known that, all along, and she will reply to your arguments by saying that riches do not bring happiness, and that you told her so. See what comes of bringing up children to be romantic!"

"You would not have me teach them to worship money!" cried Mme. Dandria; "it is not my fault that Mons. du Pourméval is rich and Lieutenant Pontac poor."

"No, and, after all, that may not be the case, perhaps."

"What do you mean?"

"Day before yesterday, as Dr. Sully was going away, after ordering rest and perfect quiet for Germaine, he whispered to me, "do not let Mme. Dandria formally accept Arthur as a son-in-law until you see me again."

"That is very strange!"

"Yes, and I wonder that he has not come to explain himself. I told Alfred to stop at his house and ask him up to dinner this evening. In the

meanwhile, had you not better question the young lady herself?"

"Yes, Armand, if you will help me."

"Certainly—Germaine!"

"Coming, Uncle," she replied, from the other end of the green-house; and the next minute she stood before them, her eyes sparkling with merriment, her hair a little disordered, and a saucy smile on her lips."

"What grave faces! You look like two judges waiting to interrogate a prisoner. What crime am I accused of?"

"I will tell you if you promise to answer frankly."

"Have you ever known me to tell an untruth?"

"No; but to be silent is not to lie, and you have—."

"You always say I talk too much!"

"Be serious for a few minutes, Germaine, and answer me. What do you think of Arthur du Pourméval?"

"Excellent—as leader of the german; but not the *husband* for me."

"You ought to have said so before. It is very wrong to make promises that you do not intend to fulfill."

"I did not make any promise, mamma; I said I would reflect."

"But you had no idea of accepting him. Why have you been so disingenuous?"

"Because I want him to have Ernestine."

"That is absurd."

"No, I was right; look there, mamma," and she pointed toward her sister.

Mme. Dandria and Uncle Armand leaned forward and saw Arthur du Pourméval walking along outside the green-house, near where Ernestine was seated, unconscious of his presence.

"Do not move; he is coming in," whispered Germaine; "but he cannot see us through these plants; he thinks there is no one here but Ernestine."

The splendid Arthur had strangely altered in looks since the day of the *battue*. His face was haggard, his eyes bloodshot, his toilet less faultless than usual, and as he entered the green-house, hat in hand, he seemed to have lost even his firm step and stately air.

Ernestine, absorbed in her painting, did not see him until he stood before her. Then she turned slightly pale but looked at him calmly.

"You want to see my mother, monsieur?"

"No," he answered, in a low tone, "I want to see you."

"Really! What have you to say to me?"

"Do you not know, Miss Ernestine?"

"I do not."

"I am here to entreat you to pardon me."

"For what, may I ask?"

"For doubting you. I believed you were coquetting with me, for I could not induce you to give me any encouragement, and I thought that if I succeeded in making you jealous—forgive me, I have never ceased to love you!"

"And yet you offered yourself to my sister."

"I knew that she would pretend to encourage me, and refuse me in the end."

"How did you know it?"

"I discovered that she was in love with Mons. Pontac. Ernestine, I swear to you that I have never changed; appearances, I know, are against me, but only give me hope and I will go to your mother this very day. Where is she?"

"She is down there, behind those tall plants."

"What!" he cried in surprise, "she is there?"

"Yes, but I advise you not to go to her. The best thing you can do is to leave this place at once and never venture here again."

Du Pourméval flushed hotly as he received his dismissal, and before he could make any reply Alfred hastily entered the green-house, exclaiming:

"Mamma, Ernestine, I have news; where are you? Oh, du Pourméval, are *you* here; I did not expect to see you. You have not heard the rumor that is going the rounds of Arcy?"

"What rumor?" stammered Arthur.

"Perhaps it is not true. At any rate I don't want to be the one to tell it you."

Arthur du Pourméval did not wait to hear any more, but bowing awkwardly to Ernestine turned and fled, without another word.

"Why, it must be true!" said Alfred looking after him in astonishment.

"What is it Alfred?" called Mons. Dandria from the other end of the green-house.

"Is that you, Uncle? and mamma, and Germaine, why! You must be playing hide-and-seek."

"What is your news?" asked his uncle, abruptly.

"Mme. Vignemal's will has been found, and it disinherits her husband."

"Impossible!" cried Mme. Dandria.

"That settles du Pourméval's case. But who *will* inherit?" said Uncle Armand.

"No one knows yet, but it will not be Arthur, for she could not bear him."

"Perhaps she made no bequest at all, and in that case her fortune will go to her natural heirs. The Doctor could tell us all about it, I am sure. Did you take my message to him, Alfred?"

"He was not at home."

"Then if you want to be useful for once in your life, take Ralph and gallop to Arcy. It is the Doctor's hour for being in his office; so you cannot miss him if you make haste. Tell him I want to see him immediately."

When Alfred was gone Mons. Dandria turned to his sister, saying:

"Do you understand this, Queen?"

"I understand that Mons. du Pourméval is penniless. Ernestine was right in saying that her sister ought not to keep him waiting so long for his answer; people will say that she was going to marry him for his money."

"I don't care what they say, for I shall soon be able to prove that I am not mercenary," replied Germaine gaily.

"Do you know what Mons. du Pourméval has just told me?" said Ernestine.

"No, we were too far off to hear your conversation."

"He said that he never loved any one but me—he swore to it."

"I knew how it would be!" cried Germaine in delight, but Mons. Dandria frowned fiercely, saying :

"What does this fellow mean by changing about, and asking first one sister and then the other? Does he think that he only has to make his choice? The next time I see him—"

"You are not likely to see him, uncle, for he will not come here again," said Ernestine.

"He is a scoundrel!"

"No, he is only mercenary and calculating."

"We could pardon him that," said Mme. Dandria, "if he had not shown himself to be utterly heartless. God forbid that he should ever enter our family."

"Then I was right not to accept him," said Germaine, maliciously.

"Yes, your woman's instinct was right this time, but you must explain yourself fully. You love some one else. Now, who is it?"

"Can you not guess, uncle?"

"I think I can. It is Roger Pontac."

“Yes.”

“And you love him because he killed a stag—bravely I admit. That is all very nice; but how many times had you seen the young gentleman before the day of the *battue*?”

“Once, twice, *three* times!” said Germaine, pretending to count on her fingers.

“You are dreaming, child; he has only been here twice.”

“But I knew him before he came here,” she said, slowly; “I met him the day that Ralph ran away with me?”

“Where?” her mother fairly grasped.

“On the top of Lamon Rock.”

“Confound that rock, and those absurd stories!” cried uncle Armand.

“If it had not been for my climbing up the rock I might never have got home at all; for I found Mons. Pontac there and he showed me the way.”

“And you never told me of this,” said her mother, reproachfully.

“That was wrong of me, I own, mamma, but it happened only a week ago, and I have told you now. I shall never marry any one but Mons. Pontac.”

"You speak as if you were sure he wanted you," said her uncle.

"If he does not, I shall be an old maid," she answered, smiling.

"Well, I have nothing to say against him; but what will you have to live on? His pay is about forty dollars a month.

"Perhaps Mons. Pontac is not so poor as we think," said Ernestine, coming to her sister's rescue; "for if Mme. Vignemal has really revoked her will, he will have his share of the inheritance."

"What are you talking about, my dear?" asked her uncle in amazement.

"Mons. Pontac is Mme. Vignemal's cousin; ask Dr. Sully if it is not so," she added, seeing the incredulous expressions on her mother's and uncle's faces.

"It is true; I knew it long ago," put in Germaine; "the Doctor told us about it on the night of the accident on the river. Do you not remember his speaking of the child whom Mme. Vignemal adopted and sent to school?"

"Oh, yes; but was that child Roger Pontac?"

"Certainly—but here comes the Doctor himself. Ask him about it."

Dr. Sully entered the green-house at that moment, and shook hands with the family, saying :

“I have brought you a piece of news which will astonish you.”

“And we have just sent Alfred to your house—you must have met him on the road.”

“No, I have come from Bretteville, where I have been talking over this wonderful news. It seems that Roland Ferrer—who, by the way, left here yesterday to enlist in the army of Africa—found on the bank of the river a sort of pocket-book belonging to Mme. Vignemal. This he gave to me a few days ago, and I, thinking that it might contain important news, took it to Mons. Lestrigon, who opened it. It contained a message written by Mme. Vignemal to her husband, in which she requested him, in the event of her dying first, to give Mons. Bernier, her notary, an ebony box which she had always kept in her bed-room, and of which he held the key. This was done yesterday, and in the box was found her last will and testament, signed and sealed. I read it through carefully and can give you its contents nearly word for word.”

The Doctor stopped to take breath; no one spoke, and he went on.

“My dear husband will not be displeased at my altering my will when he has heard my reason for doing so. His only heir is his sister’s son, Arthur du Pourméval, and I am not willing that my money should go to a dissipated fellow who will spend it in extravagance. My father acquired this fortune by a life of toil and economy, and I am resolved that it shall remain in the family; I have arranged it so that my beloved husband shall enjoy full possession of the income as long as he lives, but after his death the property shall go to one who, I am confident will know how to use it.” This preamble is signed: ‘Virginia Pontac, wife of Francis Vignemal.’ ”

“*Pontac?* Was she the Lieutenant’s aunt, then?”

“Her father and Roger’s were first cousins, the children of brothers, and therefore bore the same name. The will goes on to say, ‘I give and bequeath, etc., etc., to my husband, Francis Vignemal, the *use and profits* of all my possessions, moveable and immoveable, during his life, and after him the *whole principal* shall go to my cousin, Roger Paul Pontac, sub-lieutenant of the Ninth Regiment of hussars in the army of Tunis, *on condition* of his leaving the army within twelve

months after my husband's death, and taking up his abode at Fougeray.

"I hope that Roger Pontac will comply with these conditions, and that he will forgive all unkindnesses received at my hands, as I have long ago forgotten the faults and follies of his childhood. He has lately written to me and announced his promotion to the grade of officer, and his speedy return to France; and when he comes I shall make known to him this my last will and testament.' It is dated, 'Fougeray, November 19, 1881.'"

"Then if the accident at the ferry had occurred a month earlier than it did Arthur du Pourméval would have inherited!" said Mons. Dandria.

"Then it is better as it is," replied the Doctor.

"I thought you took a great interest in du Pourméval, Doctor."

"I did so a few days ago, as must be evident by the step I took in his behalf; but I have regretted that since. Roger Pontac, I have known since his childhood, and I would answer for him as I would for my own son if I had one."

"I do not think he will be willing to resign his position in the army and settle down at Fougeray, however."

“I would not think so, either, were it not—” and he looked at Germaine, “that Fougeray is so near La Geraldine.”

“If he consults me on the matter,” she said, “I shall advise him to remain a soldier.”

“And be as poor as Job!” said Mons. Dandria shrugging his shoulders.

“Not at all,” she replied; “he will have his share of the fortune, will he not?”

The Doctor shook his head, saying, slowly:

“I think he will have to take the whole or nothing at all; for I asked Mons. Lestrigon about that, and he said that if Roger refused to comply with the conditions mentioned in the will du Pourméval could have it declared null and void, and then there would, in all probability, be a lawsuit between Arthur and the other cousins of Mme. Vignemal. The latter would most likely win the suit, but Roger would, by his own deed, have excluded himself from sharing in the inheritance. These country cousins are not interesting people, by any means; it was one of them who, seconded by a pettifogger, Vaurinet by name, first set on foot the calumnious reports that Roland Ferrer had drowned Mme. Vignemal.”

“And I believed the story!” said Uncle Armand;

“but then I did not know that our new friend Lieut. Pontac was included in it, as an accomplice. By the way, Doctor, it seems to me that the existence of this will would be looked upon as a proof of Mons. Pontac's having an *interest* in his cousin's death.”

“The public prosecutor thought of that directly, but Mons. Lestrignon showed him that a clause in the will itself proved the fallacy of the suspicion: ‘*when he comes I shall make known to him this my last will and testament.*’ Now it has been proved that Roger did not see his cousin after the making of the will, which took place only three days before her death; also that she did not tell any one of the change she had made. So how was he to know that he would inherit her money?”

“The prosecutor was obliged to admit the justice of Lestrignon's arguments, though sorely against his will, and then I set myself to plead Roland Ferrer's cause. The prosecutor soon saw that in attacking him he would have also to accuse Roger Pontac, the Duke de Bretteville's friend, which would be an insult at once to the nobility and the army, so he decided to drop the question, and our volunteer is safe from further trouble.”

“Your news is delightful, my dear Doctor,” said

Mons. Dandria, gayly, "to all of us, but especially so to one of my nieces."

"To both of them, I fancy," said the Doctor, glancing at Ernestine, who had started with delight on hearing of Roland's safety.

"Oh, of course; but Germaine is the only one who is *personally* interested in the matter."

"Is it the discomfiture of du Pourméval that gives you such pleasure?" asked the Doctor of Germaine, with a knowing smile; and after a pause he added gravely:

"We have all been deceived in that young man. As for me, I shall never undertake a matrimonial embassy again."

"You might not be so unsuccessful next time," said Germaine, lowering her eyes.

"You have just seen Roger Pontac; how does he take his good fortune?" asked Mons. Dandria.

"Very calmly indeed. To tell the truth I believe he cares less for it than he would do for a bit of red ribbon bravely won."

"He would not be mad enough to decline the inheritance?"

"I think him quite capable of doing so, but he has not decided yet. It all depends upon one circumstance; if he is going to marry and the young

lady wishes him to leave the army he will do so and become master of Fougeray; but if he remains a bachelor he will renounce the fortune and take his chance of being, some day, a general."

This information greatly astonished everyone except Germaine, who seemed to be perfectly aware of what was coming, and Ernestine smiled brightly, forgetting her own sorrow in the contemplation of her sister's happiness.

"Doctor Sully," said Mons. Dandria, suddenly, "you are too good a friend of ours for us to have any secrets from you; so I will speak with perfect frankness, and expect you to do the same. You are doubtless aware by this time that one of my nieces has bestowed her affections—without permission—upon an officer of your acquaintance. Now, as you, Doctor, are evidently the young man's confidant, you will be able to tell me whether he—"

"Oh uncle!" cried Germaine, pouting and blushing, "you are reversing the order of the dialogue—you ought to let the Doctor speak first."

"I am not going to speak at all," replied the Doctor gayly, "for there is a visitor coming."

"The deuce take the visitor, and Baptiste too,

for bringing any one here without letting us know!" cried Uncle Armand.

The family were sitting grouped in such a way that Doctor Sully was the only one who could see the new-comer, and, going hastily toward the door of the green-house, he signed to Mons. Dandria to follow him.

The three ladies looked in astonishment at the stranger, to whom Uncle Armand was bowing with great effusion; but Germaine took in the situation at a glance and whispered to her sister:

"Come, Ernestine, let us go away; you will know why directly. Quick!" and they slipped out at a side door just as the visitor was ushered in by Mons. Dandria.

He was a tall, stately personage, with snow-white hair and beard, a very erect figure, and a face entirely free from wrinkles.

"Queen, let me present to you Monsieur the Duke de Bretteville," said Mons. Dandria, and when the usual civilities had been exchanged the illustrious visitor began:

"I owe you an apology, madame, for not having called on you before; but since my dear son's death I have been living in the greatest seclusion. I come to-day to ask the hand in marriage of your

daughter for Mons. Roger Pontac, my poor son's former friend and comrade. I beg you to pardon me if I seem abrupt, but my young friend is in a state of the greatest anxiety to know his fate."

"I am very much flattered by your proposal, monsieur," said Mme. Dandria, "and I shall tell my daughter of it at once."

"It will not be necessary to ask what her sentiments are on the matter," said Uncle Armand, "for we all know what occurred in the forest two days ago; and moreover Germaine has declared that she will marry no one else; your consent, Queen, is all that is required."

"I shall not withhold that," said Mme. Dandria; "call her, Armand."

"Here I am, mamma," said a sweet voice, and Germaine, who had been listening to the conversation, entered at that moment and made a deep reverence to the Duke, who, as he looked at the fresh young face beaming with happiness, smiled for the first time since the death of his son.

"Mademoiselle," he said, bowing low and raising her hand to his lips with old-fashioned courtesy, "I always believed that Roger had good taste, but I see now that he is destined to be the happiest of men."

"But I have a condition to make," she said.

"He will agree to it."

"Are you sure of that, monsieur? I want to be the wife of an officer, but he will want to leave the army."

"Not for a twelve-month yet, and before that time he will certainly be decorated," said the Duke; "he is already proposed."

"Then I shall wait for him."

"And have the people of Arcy say that you want to make sure of the Vignemal property before you marry!" interrupted Uncle Armand.

"Mademoiselle is beyond the reach of such calumnies," replied the Duke gallantly; "but indeed it would be a heavy trial for Roger to wait so long for the fulfillment of his dearest wish."

"And if you insist on his returning to Tunis you will have to go with him," said Mons. Dandria.

"Very well, that would be delightful. I should like nothing better."

"My dear child," put in Mme. Dandria, "you know that that would not be practicable, and a year's probation would be unbearable for you both. You must give the Duke your answer at once."

"My answer? That is understood," she said, in a low tone, and the Duke exclaimed, quickly:

"Then I am authorized to take Roger the news, which he is waiting for impatiently?"

"So impatiently that he is staying quietly at Bretteville!" replied Germaine, mischievously.

"Pardon me, mademoiselle; he has so far violated the rules of etiquette as to accompany me here, and he is now waiting for me at the gate, and counting the minutes until I return to him."

"I will go and fetch him," said Uncle Armand, getting up.

"And what are you going to tell him?" asked Germaine.

"That you have as usual got an absurd idea in your head which, perhaps, he will be able to remove, and that you accept him—will that do!"

"Yes, Uncle, and you may add that I saw in the Civil Code that a wife must obey her husband; I will abide by the law."

"Then the marriage shall be celebrated in the castle," said the Duke, smiling. "Roger wants me to be his best man, and I leave for Italy in six weeks."

"That is a great honor for us, monsieur, but meanwhile I have a few minutes' more liberty,

which I will occupy in having a tête-à-tête with my sister."

She turned to Ernestine as she spoke, and drew her out into the garden.

"Are you sure, quite sure, that you do not love him any more?" she asked, earnestly.

"Perfectly sure; I only despise him."

"And you love some one else instead."

"Nonsense Germaine, what put such an idea into your head?"

"I saw you go up to Lamon Rock the other day. Was it not to consult the fairies?"

"You know that I have nothing to ask of them," said Ernestine, smiling sadly.

"Sometimes they speak without being asked. But do not tell your secret if you would rather not; only I hope that you will do as I am doing—marry the man of your choice, and never mind the rest. I am sorry for one thing, though, and that is that Roger is so rich; people will say that I have made 'a good match.' You will not be accused of being mercenary, but you will have what I longed for—a brave soldier coming home to you with nobly-earned honors."

"In about ten years!" said Ernestine; "it is a long, long time."

Roger became a sub-lieutenant in eight years, and he did not know me then ; whereas Roland has the thought of you to—”

“*Roland?*” repeated Ernestine, “what are you saying, sister?”

“I have guessed your secret, you see. Do not try to deny it. Roland Ferrer will come back in five years time, and I predict that you will wait for him ; here comes Uncle Armand with Roger ; you must come and be introduced to your brother-in-law.”

* * * * *

Roger and Germaine were married yesterday, and he will send in his resignation before the end of the year.

Roland Ferrer has entered a brigade, and bids fair to win his epaulettes before long. Will Germaine’s prediction be fulfilled?

Why not?

THE END.

